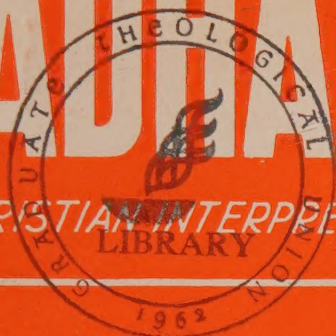


EEVADHARA

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION



BIBLE AND WORLD RELIGIONS

ISRAEL AND INCULTURATION: AN APPRAISAL

E. C. John

PATRIARCHAL APPROACHES TOWARDS "WORLD RELIGIONS"

Cheriyen Menacherry

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TO THE DEUTERONOMISTIC TRADITION

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THE PROPHETS AND THE NATIONS

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JESUS AND THE NATIONS

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PAUL AND HIS ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE "GENTILES"

Joseph Pathrapankal

DISCUSSION FORUM

March 1984

JEEVADHARA

is published every month
alternately in English and Malayalam

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JEEVADHARA

The Word of God

BIBLE AND WORLD RELIGIONS

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Editorial

Thanks to the Second Vatican Council, a new and official attitude of the Church towards non-Christian religions has been approved in the *Declaration on non-Christian Religions* and it is only a matter of obedience to the teaching authority of the Church to make this new teaching our own. It is, however, interesting to study the dynamics which worked behind the formation of this document. The Catholic Church wanted to formulate in unambiguous terms her attitude towards the Jews as one of love and appreciation. This was already initiated by Pope John XXIII through the removal of certain prayers "against the Jews" from the liturgy of Good Friday. There was some suspicion in certain quarters that the Catholic Church did not seriously condemn the persecution of the Jews during Hitler's Nazi regime. With all that prejudicious background the Council wanted to add a Chapter to the Decree on Ecumenism in which it wanted to spell out its esteem and love for Judaism. In the discussion that followed it became evident that not only Judaism but also Islam needs to be appreciated because of its common link with Christianity through the Old Testament. The long history of discussion about this topic and related matters led to a new vision of things. The Church must express her views about all non-Christian religions as a whole. The immediate background of the discussion was something connected with Europe, namely, the question of the Jews. But now it became a universal issue and thanks to such an outlook, we have a document which gives the positive attitude of the Church towards the major religions of the world, starting with Hinduism, then Buddhism, Islam and Judaism. The document says: "The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions. She looks with sincere respect upon those ways of conduct and of life, those rules and teachings which, though differing in many particulars from what she holds and sets forth, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men." India is the cradle and haven of all major religions of the world. Hence the Document on non-Christian religions has its direct application to this country more than to many other countries of the world.

The present issue of *Jeevadhara* is an attempt to present these concerns and analyse the attitude of the Bible to the other world religions. The first article by E.C. John, Principal of United Theological College, Bangalore, and Professor of Old Testament is an attempt at an appraisal on Israel and inculturation through which he sets some sound principles that worked in the growth of Israel. Cheriyan Menacherry, a post-graduate in Theology, has analysed the Patriarchal approaches towards World Religions: especially in relation to Abraham as one exposed and well-disposed to other religions. R. Vande Walle, Professor of Old Testament in Jnana Deepa, Pune, studies Israel's attitude towards the Nations according to the Deuteronomistic tradition, a tradition supposed to be very negative towards the nations as a whole. The Prophets of the Old Testament are considered to be the most intolerant people towards other religions. George Koonthanam, Professor of Old Testament, analyses the context and contents of their moral indignation and dwells on their message and writings for our times, especially for India. Lucius Nereparambil, Professor of New Testament in Dharmaram Pontifical Institute, focuses his attention on Jesus and the nations, studying how Jesus related himself to the non-Jews, and analyses basic texts in the Gospels to establish the open approach of Jesus to the non-Jews. The concluding article is by Joseph Pathrapankal, President of Dharmaram Pontifical Institute and Professor of New Testament, in which he analyses the attitude of Paul to the "Gentiles", a technical term Paul uses throughout his writings. The study focuses attention on Paul's Jewish background and also on some factors which led to Paul's negative attitude. But this does not in any way allow us to continue the same negative attitude as we are living in a different world, a different culture and a different stage in the history of inter-religious relationship. It is hoped that this bold analysis of the "Bible and World-Religions" will pave the way for the promoters of inter-religious dialogue to take bold steps along healthy lines of inter-religious attitudes and actions.

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Israel and Inculturation: an Appraisal

No people have ever remained totally immune from the influences of the culture of other peoples among whom they have lived or with whom they came into close contact. The people of the Old Testament were no exception. Even though there were marked differences in the religious practices, faith and ethics of ancient Israel from those of the other peoples of ancient West Asia, a careful study has revealed similarities and gradual adaptation by ancient Israel of certain aspects of the religion and culture of the ancient Mesopotamians, Egyptians and the Canaanites. The purpose of this article is to point out in broad outline some aspects of this process of assimilation or what is called 'Inculturation'.

It has long been recognized that the God of the patriarchs is described in close relation to the names of the patriarchs, thus indicating a close relationship between God and the patriarchal clan. So in Gen. 15:1 God is called Abraham's Shield, in Gen. 31:42, 53 the Fear of Isaac and in 49:24, the Mighty One of Jacob. God may be called 'the God of Abraham', 'the God of Nahor', the 'God of their fathers', 'the God of Isaac', and the 'God of Jacob' (Gen. 26:24; 28:13; 32:9; Exod. 3:6,15). It was Albrecht Alt who first drew the attention of scholars to this type of religion. Whereas a god is usually associated with a particular locality and to a particular shrine, in the case of the religion of the patriarchs, God is associated with the patriarchs and is not confined to any locality. The 'God of the fathers' blesses, leads and protects them, as they move from one place to another or in their settled life.

The Canaanite culture does not provide any parallel to this kind of religion. It is therefore of special significance that in the course of their wanderings in Canaan the

Patriarchs identified their God with the God 'El, the Supreme God of the Ugaritic pantheon, who was worshipped with different titles in different parts of Canaan. In Jerusalem, he was worshipped under the name 'El 'Elyon (Gen. 14:18ff), in Beer Sheba as 'El 'Olam (Gen. 21:33), in Bethel as 'El Bethel (Gen. 31:13; 35:7) and so on. The adoption of these names and titles meant far more than adding synonyms to the personal name of the God of Ancient Israel. It involved certainly the appropriation or adaptation of certain ideas and religious rites.

The worship of 'El had assumed elaborate cults including seasonal festivals relating to the agricultural year, some of which were fertility rites, sacrifices etc. One of the titles of 'El was creator of the earth, adopted by the people of the Old Testament as an article of faith. However, fertility practices like sacrificing cows with their calves (Exod. 23:19), or the divine intercourse of Baal and Anat enacted by the worshippers through intercourse with the 'sacred' prostitutes of the Canaanite shrines, also meant for promoting fertility, were rejected by the prophets as contrary to their faith in the God of the Fathers (see Amos 2:7, "a man and his father go to the same maiden"). This is illustrative of the whole process of the Hebrew adaptation of certain beliefs and practices native to the Canaanite soil and rejecting certain others as unacceptable. With regard to the agricultural festivals like the feast of ingathering (or booths) we notice a principle of radical change in the process of adaptation. The festival of booths for the native Canaanite agricultural community represented in all likelihood the nuptial chamber for the god and goddess. For the Hebrews, however, this festival was a memorial of the period of wandering in the wilderness under the protection and guidance of God when they lived in tents before their settlement in Canaan.

The personal name of Ancient Israel's God was Yahweh. Even though according to the Yahwist source the ancestors of Israel worshipped God under the name of

Yahweh from the beginning (Gen. 4:26), other sources show beyond doubt that historically the origin of Yahweh worship is to be dated much later, namely to the time of Moses (Ex. 3:13-15; 6:3). The priestly source of Ex. 6:3 seeks to counteract the possible misunderstanding that Moses introduced a new God under the new name of Yahweh:

"God said to Moses, 'I am Yahweh. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name Yahweh I did not make myself known to them'."

We must infer from this passage that in the course of Israel's early religious history diverse religious traditions were combined in the evolution of the Yahwistic faith. The traditions associated with the ancient shrine at Shiloh reveal the fact that Yahweh was worshipped there as Yahweh Sebaoth and was represented by the ark which was a throne chest (see I Sam. 4,4; 2 Sam. 6:2). The Israelites used to make their pilgrimages to this shrine.

With regard to the adoption of the Canaanite 'El religion by the Hebrews we may recognize three stages. In the patriarchal stories 'El and the God of the fathers occur side by side. At a later stage Yahweh steps in the place of 'El (see Ps. 81:9: "There shall not be a strange 'El among you, you shall not bow down to a foreign 'El"). Finally the competition, so to say, is all over as we read: "Yahweh is El and he has given us light." (Ps. 118: 27)

The event of far-reaching importance in the process of inculturation was of course David's conquest of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was an ancient Canaanite city, rich in cultic traditions and the Temple built by Solomon became the national shrine of the Israelite nation. Many of the religious traditions of the former Jebusite sanctuary were assimilated into the Israelite religious culture. Important among them were the ideas relating to the Temple as

God's dwelling place and the King who reigns in Zion God's anointed. The God of the fathers who journeyed with the wandering Israelites and who moved with the Israelite armies symbolized by the Ark was now regarded as dwelling in the holy of holies and worshippers thronged to Mount Zion 'to see the face of God' and worship at his foot-stool. The title of 'El, as King and his attribute as holy became Yahweh's title and attribute. An amalgamation of the ancient faith of the God of the Fathers and the religion of the newly found home may be recognized in the title 'Holy One of Israel' given by the prophet Isaiah to the God of Israel. God is the awe-inspiring, numinous deity, but also one who is near to Israel, who calls Israel to reflect his nature of justice and righteousness.

Mount Zion as the dwelling place of God meant that Israel also shared the beliefs underlying the creation stories which formed part of the temple traditions all over Ancient West Asia. The temple, being God's dwelling place, is ascribed the features of paradise, as we can see from the Songs of Zion (Pss. 46, 48) and from the Prophets (Is. 2: 2-4; Ezek. 47). Just as a river flowed out from the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:10) there is, on Mount Zion according to the temple ideology, 'a river whose streams make glad the city of God' (Ps. 46:4). As a matter of fact, there was no river on Mount Zion, except a spring, namely, the Spring of Gihon, at the foot of the hill. But the temple being the source of life is also regarded in religious imagination as providing the source of water, water symbolising life in all its fulness. Paradise is also the place where there is perfect harmony in the whole created world. The prophet Isaiah envisages the realisation of international peace originating from Jerusalem (Is. 2:3,4; compare Ps. 46:9). The presence of God in Zion guaranteed not only the security and well-being of all God's people, but also the indestructibility of Jerusalem itself (Ps. 46:5; 48:3). This gave rise to the strong belief among the Jews that the City of God can never fall, however strong the enemy may be. The prophet Jeremiah spoke against the false con-

fidence that resulted from this belief (Jer. 7:4; compare Lam. 2:15) and warned that God's abode on earth will be destroyed, if the people do not amend their evil conduct. The prophetic insight is in sharp contrast to the non-Israelite religions for which it was inconceivable to believe that a god could survive without his temple and the people to worship him.

One element in the creation stories among Israel's neighbouring cultures is the conflict motif. There is a battle among the gods, between good and evil. It is with the victory of Marduk over Tiamat in Babylon or Baal over Yam in Ugarit that order prevails over chaos. In the creation stories in the Book of Genesis the conflict and the consequent combat is totally missing, though there are allusions to it in other parts of the Old Testament. Further, while in the Egyptian and Babylonian religions the gods themselves had to emerge first. Ancient Israel believed that God was always present: "In the beginning God..." The Babylonians believed that humankind was created by the Supreme God Ea out of the blood of his opponent Kingu, and they were created so that they may serve the gods and the gods themselves may be free from domestic worries and toil. It is also of interest to note that the Old Testament speaks of man and woman, i.e. all people, created in the image of God and not just kings, as was the case with some other ancient cultures. Here we see a radical change in the Israelite understanding of man, that all men and women are representatives of God on earth. The dominion man is commanded to exercise is over the rest of the created world of animals and vegetation and not over other human beings. We may note also that while other ancient cultures in the Ancient West Asia like the Egyptian and Babylonian give only the genealogies of the gods and the kings, the Hebrew Bible lists the genealogy of all humankind (see chs. 5, 10) indicating an altogether different understanding of the people.

This leads us to the whole question of kingship and messianic expectation in the Old Testament. It is an

area of life where the Israelites were greatly influenced by their neighbouring cultures. Israel adopted the institution of kingship which was a totally alien institution, with much opposition and out of the kingship ideology emerged the hope of the Messiah to come. The Apostles of the primitive Church interpreted Jesus as the fulfilment of the messianic expectations of the Old Testament.

The institution of kingship was adopted in Ancient Israel centuries after monarchy was well established in Egypt, Mesopotamia and Canaan. Palestine had its many Canaanite city states, each governed by a king. The early attempts of adoption of monarchy was ridiculed by the noble spirits as it is illustrated in the amusing fable narrated by Jotham (Ju. 9:7-15). When the people asked Samuel to appoint a king, seeing that only a properly organised army under the leadership of a king would be able to fight against the Philistines, it was interpreted as a desire to become "like all other nations" (1 Sam. 8:19). What seemed practical wisdom was looked at in some circles as a rejection of God Himself as King (1 Sam. 8:8). These passages show beyond doubt the fact that at least in some Israelite circles kingship was not only seen as a foreign and pagan political structure but as a deliberate rejection of the protection and guidance offered by God Himself.

The reasons for this opposition were not far to seek. The whole structure of their society, well organised as it was in families, clans and tribes, with all the freedom and honour they enjoyed, would be upset by the concentration of power in the person of the King (read 1 Sam. 8:10-18). Samuel had spoken to them about the conscription of young men and women by the king, forcible deprivation of their possessions and the levying of taxes which the king would exercise through his powerful position.

As kingship developed in Israel, even though this danger was always inherent, there were certain duties and rights belonging to this office which had to be mutu-

ally agreed by the king and the subjects (see 1 Sam. 10:25). We read later of king David entering into a covenant or agreement with his subjects only after which was he anointed by the elders as king (2 Sam. 5:1-5). The criticisms of the prophets against the unbridled power of the king and against their oppression of the people give ample evidence of how kingship underwent a radical change as this political institution found its place in Ancient Israel.

We need to remember at this point that the other nations of West Asia in those days regarded the king as the son of God and therefore divine. Being divine, he was remote from the people and he had no equal. No doubt, certain aspects of the divine kingship and its unique role in the cult became part of the Israelite kingship ideology as can be seen from the royal Psalms like Psalms 2 and 110 and the messianic passages (Is. 9;11;32). However, his divine sonship is only an adopted sonship and not a natural one and his responsibility to rescue the people and maintain justice receives more and more emphasis (see 2 Sam. 23:3,4). Thus the process of inculturation meant a process of adaptation and radical modification of what was appropriated from the cultures of other religions.

There are many other areas of Israel's faith and practice where the influence from neighbouring cultures have left their indelible mark, as in the concepts of human destiny, death and beyond, speculations about the mediatory powers between God and men, like angelology. A great deal of Old Testament wisdom sayings, especially those in the Book of Proverbs are similar to those found in an earlier Egyptian wisdom work called the wisdom of Amenemope. The words of the prophet Ezekiel: "Your origin and your birth are of the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite", is true not only of the racial ancestry of Ancient Israel but also of its religious history.

Until a few decades ago, biblical scholarship directly emphasized the uniqueness of the Old Testament. One

aspect that was often pointed out to illustrate this point was the faith in a God who reveals Himself through concrete actions in the realm of history. Comparative study with other contemporary cultures has shown that such an immediate uniqueness cannot be maintained as it was done in the past (see B. Albrektson, *History and the Gods*, 1967). The brief review given above has indicated some of the similarities and differences, the continuity and discontinuity between the cultural and religious milieu of Ancient Israel and the faith of the Old Testament. There was hardly an area of faith which was immune from the influence of the other religions and cultures. We should not take this as a threat to the uniqueness of the faith of Israel. In fact, our own faith and practices are the result of centuries of interaction with the other cultures though we may not readily recognize and admit it. Through the centuries certain religious and social ideas have continued to make their impact on us and we need to ask ourselves afresh how we acknowledge this tradition in the midst of to-day's plurality.

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Patriarchal Approaches towards 'World Religions'

Introduction

In our rapidly shrinking global village one religion cannot just ignore or escape from the influence of the other world religions. Even though the encounter with the world religions is a crucial problem now-a-days, our forefathers had even more radically faced this issue. "Faced with problems relating to cultural confrontations these writers (J, E, P traditions) went back to the patriarchal tradition and reinterpreted them to their contemporaries because they looked upon the patriarchal traditions as the first experience of the people of God in their encounter with the other religions and cultures."¹ Once again as we are faced with the same situation of interrelationship with the other world religions, we here make an attempt to turn to the patriarchal tradition to get new insights for a better relation with the world religions. In the present article the main concentration is on patriarch Abraham's relationship with the other nations (religions)².

Abraham exposed to the World Religions

There was never in the history of Abraham when he was not in touch with the other nations. Till Abraham's father Terah set out from Ur of Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan (Gen. 11:31), Abraham was in touch with the religions of Babylon. Later Abraham's family travelled up to the ancient, rich Tigris-Euphrates Valley to Haran. From there Abraham called by God journeyed through Syria into

1. P. V. Premsagar, "Theology of Promise in the Patriarchal Narratives", *The Indian Journal of Theology*, XXII (1974) p. 113.

2. The other patriarchal narratives are weaved more or less in the same pattern of Abraham's story. (Cf. P. V. Premsagar, *art cit* p. 120)

Palestine. After an interlude in Egypt he returned to Palestine, the land of promise. In all these places he should have encountered other religions. In fact, Abraham and his descendants up to Joseph, travelled more than Moses and his men travelled from Egyptian captivity to the freedom of Canaan! Thus Abraham was more exposed to the 'world religions' and quite naturally there was every possibility for the increasing amount of strife, quarrel and war. Yet Abraham's history is depicted as having more peace, and on the other hand 'Exodus history' and the 'Deuteronomist history' are notorious for their strife, wars and blood-shed. Why was there comparatively quiet atmosphere in the history of Abraham? It is because of Abraham's basic peace-loving nature which is explicit in his dealings with Lot. Abraham allowed Lot his brother to choose the fertile Jordan Valley and himself settled in the land of Canaan in order not to have any strife between him and Lot (Gen. 13:8ff). It is this basic constitution of Abraham that enabled him to have a healthy relation with the other nations, nay, it is to bless these nations that Abraham was called.

Blessed to bless the nations (religions)

The life of Abraham's family or clan and the subsequent events of his life are primarily the blessings of Yahweh: "The patriarchal narratives... correspond to the life of a family or a clan and the events that are determinative of it. The activity of God that determines these events is not primarily deliverance but blessing."³ Abraham's superior blessing is that he became the source of blessing to all the nations. This started from the command: "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." (Gen. 12:1) And this call was to send him for a great mission concerning 'world religions': "Behold my covenant is with you. No longer shall your name be Abram (exalted Father) but Abraham

3. Claus Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible and the life of the Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), p. 6.

(Father of multitude of nations) (Gen. 17:4). If Yahweh showers blessings upon blessings on Abraham it has a universal significance, for it has to reach all the nations: "And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves." (Gen. 12:2-3, cf. Gen. 18:18) Not only by Abraham but also by his descendants shall all the 'nations of the earth bless themselves' (Gen. 22:18; 26:4). Then it must be taken in the sense that Abraham was the primary source and stream of blessing. God blessed Abraham and in that source of blessing all the people of the world would participate.

By making Abraham the source of blessing Yahweh intended that his blessing should be reached to all the families of the earth through Abraham (Gen. 12:2-3). So the blessing of God to Abraham is no more restricted only to Abraham and his clan. But it has to reach, through Abraham, to all the families of the earth. Bede Griffiths says: "It is important to observe that from the beginning the promise was made on behalf of 'all the races of the world'. Though Israel was (specially) chosen to be the 'people of God', . . . this was so that it should be the source of salvation for all mankind. St. Paul in his letter to the Romans makes a great point, that the promise was made to Abraham before he was circumcised, that is, before he was made a Jew, so that he might be the father of all who believe. In this sense Abraham is the father not only of the Jews and the Christians, the Muslims who acknowledge him as the father of their faith, but of all those who seek God or any transcendent state or value, which only faith can recognise. Thus the universality of the divine promise was made clear from the beginning. Abraham is the representative of mankind, which receives in him the promise of salvation, and begins to be formed into a people through whom the human race will be reconciled with God. This people will be educated and taught by the prophets, that it may be prepared for the

reception of the spirit of God. But in all this it is mankind which is being taught and trained and prepared for its destiny. So that the history of Israel is the story of mankind."4 In this sense the supreme blessing: "I will be your God and your descendants' God" (Gen. 17:7d), must be not only for Abraham and his clan but also for all the nations. This Yahweh wanted to be the Lord of nations. He wanted this privileged blessing be appropriated by all the nations. Yet this blessing had to reach all only in and through the source of the blessing (Abraham). And that was how Abram had to become the Father of the nations - Abraham. As a result, apart from the other nations, races and religions Abram cannot be Abraham. The sacred writer may be hinting at the crucial role of the world religions in making Abraham the father of the nations. Thus at the very starting of the salvation history the sacred writer brings home the unique role of the world religions in the universal plan of God.

Yahweh's choicest vessel of blessing overflows in all directions

It was to bless the other nations that Yahweh had blessed Abraham. And only in so far as he makes others share in Yahweh's blessings that his response will be complete. Abraham began his blessing mission in his own humble way. He became a source of blessing to his own kith and kin. We read how Abraham brought blessing in the life of his nephew Lot by avoiding clashes between their herdsmen. And Abraham magnanimously granted Lot the prodigiously fertile land of the Jordan basin (Gen. 13:5-12). Later Abraham saved Lot and his family from the enemies (Gen. 14:11-16).

Even when the sign of promise (Isaac) was there in her bosom Sarah was very narrow-minded. Isaac should have been a living testimony to God's trustworthiness, a

4. Bede Griffiths, *The Marriage of East and West* (London: Collins, 1982), p. 125

spur to faith for Sarah. But instead his presence made her worry about his future. She did not want to share Yahweh's blessing to others (other nations). And she had driven away Hagar and Ishmael from her house. Here is the clear example of the misinterpretation of Yahweh's plan concerning other nations⁵. We also will do this kind of misinterpretation of the plan of God when we dislike to give serious consideration to the world religions in God's plan. On the other hand, even though Abraham sided with Sarah in sending Ishmael away, he was a little reluctant to part with Ishmael. And this sorrowful situation of Abraham caused Ishmael to receive the blessings from God (Gen. 21:11-13). It was on Abraham's behalf that God saved and blessed another nation in Ishmael⁶.

Abraham's mission of blessing did not remain in the narrow confines of kinship ties. It began to overflow his family circles.

The call of Abraham was to bless the other nations and thus to become the Father of the nations. This he would achieve in so far as he extended the blessings to the other nations. So he could not be the source of blessing only to his own near and dear ones. The blessing had to be channelled to the entire humanity irrespective of 'nationality' and 'religion'. What was Abraham's attitude towards his own people must also be his attitude towards the surrounding nations.

Yahweh revealed to Abraham his will concerning the pagan towns of Sodom and Gomorah. Thus He caused Abraham to act as an intermediary between Himself and the people of that region, and to plead for God's blessing on those pagan people. Abraham was so zealous in carrying out his mission as a source of blessing to the other nations

5. Cf. P. V. Premsagar, *art. cit.* p. 118.

6. Cf. L. Hicks, "Abraham", in *Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible* Vol I, ed. by George Arthur Buttrick and others, (New York: Abingdon Press. 1962), p. 19.

that he tried to extort God's mercy to those countries by 'bargaining' with Him (Gen. 18:24-37). And he tried in vain to make those towns participate in his source of blessing. "In interceding for non-Israelites, Abraham did indeed here become a source of blessing to other families of the earth" (Cf. Gen. 12:2-3)⁷. Abimelech, who took away Sarah his wife from him, was not at all a revengeful one. There also he turns to be a source of blessing to the erring king. Abraham invoked God's blessing on Abimelech (Gen. 20:17ff). And then he made a covenant with Abimelech (Gen. 21:22-34). This event will ever remain as a shining example for the inter-religious dialogue. When Abraham showered God's blessings on Abimelech (20:17ff) the king recognized God's hand in Abraham. It does not mean that Abimelech forsook his faith and embraced Abraham's religion. But he recognized divine presence in Abraham and he sought friendship with such a man by entering into a covenantal relationship with Abraham. When Abimelech came to Abraham recognizing the blessing of Yahweh, Abraham was the least preoccupied with proselytizing (circumcising) Abimelech. As the father of the nations, his important duty was to share God's blessings with others. When Abraham entered into a covenant with him, he extended his own blessing to the heathen king and his people.

Dialogue with the pagan priests

Biblical scholars used to make hair-splitting analysis of the incident of Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18-20) to know who is greater than whom, Melchizedek or Abraham. The author of Abraham's story seems least worried about it. Abraham is in fact delighted in receiving blessings from a pagan priest, king Melchizedek, that too from Melchizedek's 'El Elyon. Discussions are going on to identify this 'El Elyon of Melchizedek⁸. Is he a local deity of Canaan? or

7. L. Hicks, *ibid* p. 18.

8. Cf. Loren R. Fisher, "Abraham and his priest king", *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXXXI (1962) Pp. 264-271.

one of the deities of the Canaanite pantheon? Is he Yahweh of Abraham recognized by Melchizedek? According to biblical scholars 'El Elyon is the Lord of heaven and earth. He is the parent of all the Gods of heaven and earth⁹. 'El Elyon may be a Canaanite Supreme God, and Melchizedek the priest of that God. Abraham recognized that priest and the blessing of 'El Elyon. And he offered tithes to the pagan priest. As Abimelech recognized a divine dimension in Abraham and made covenant with Abraham, so Abraham finds a divine aspect of the pagan priest and offers tithes. This is an indirect admission of the hidden hand of the Supreme Being in all the religions. To our wonder the incident does not stop with Abraham. The later scripture traditions (e. g. Ps 110:4; Heb 7:1-10) take boldly that pagan priest as the supreme model of priesthood even as symbol of the priesthood of Jesus Christ. There is all possibility that the nomadic religion of Abraham that had no 'priesthood' would have adopted the priesthood after the Canaanite priesthood model: eg. David was a priest-king.¹⁰ Here is a clear challenge to all the scholars of world religions to think of the possibility of recognizing the priesthood of the world religions. (Unfortunately we cannot yet even recognize the priesthood of the different Christian denominations.)

Fear not religious syncretism?

When different religions flourish, there will be re-

9. Cf. Loren R. Fisher, *art cit.* p. 267.

10. Cf. Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1977), p. 193. "The later Israelites appropriated the names and titles of Canaan's gods to their own Yahweh; as the sanctuaries became Yahwistic, so the religious language of Yahwism became Canaanite Yahweh is called 'El Elyon in Psalms 78:35.... It was in virtue, of this thing that had happened that the biblical author of Genesis 14 could recount with equanimity the blessing of Abraham by a Canaanite priest He took it for granted that the God of patriarchs, by whatever name he was called was the self-same God of Israel that he worshipped. Melchizedek was a heathen king and priest in pre-Israelite Jerusalem. Melchizedek's blessing had involved the name of God Most High. For the author and for his audience there was and

ligious syncretism. A certain amount of healthy religious syncretism is tenable for the development of one's own authentic religion. Syncretism expressed the process of struggle between two incompatible forms of faith. It involves holding on to one's own faith and yet appreciating the contrary religious point of view in the other religion, to such an extent that there results a transformation of one's own particular faith.¹¹ Moltmann emphasises the positive aspect of syncretism as opposed to the common negative understanding of it, as the absorption or blending of one religion into another.

The religion of the Patriarchs developed along the healthy syncretic pattern, that is, between the religion of the nomads and the religions of the canaanite peasant. The nomadic religion emphasised the coming of God of promise, and the canaanite religion the present God of blessing, and Yahwism emphasized the command of God and the obedience of his worshippers.¹² The inter-mingling of the three religious patterns occasioned the patriarchal promise pattern 'command - promise - blessing'. In the nomadic (promise) religion the deity is connected with the people. In the Canaanite religion (epiphany religion) deity is bound to a particular place. Israelite Yahweh is not an apparitional God, because his appearance is not an end in itself but is the means of declaring promises¹³. When two religions come in contact with each other, there occurs a syncretism for the development of religions. This is true also in the case of patriarchal nomadic religion.

could be only one God Most High. and Jerusalem was indeed his holy place."

11. Cf. J. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (New York- Harper & Row, 1967), p. 96. Cf. P. V. Premsagar, p. 113.

12. Cf. P. V. Premsagar, art cit p. 113.

13. Cf. J. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, op. cit. p. 100. Cf. P. V. Premsagar art cit p. 115.

Abraham is a very important personality in the OT. He was a victorious warrior who sat with kings (Gen 14), a mighty prince (Gen 23), he was hospitable to strangers (Gen 18), and a prophet who interceded for others (Gen. 18, 20). "Yet the important aspect about Abraham was the promise he received. He is 'assigned the role of a mediator of blessing in God's saving plan, for all the families of earth' (Gen 12:1-3)¹⁴. The important promise to Abraham that he would be the source of blessing to the nations was 'developed' or rather got 'matured' because of the constant contact of the nomadic religion with the Canaanite ones. When the future orientation of promise is related to the present through the idea of blessing, the unhistorical blessing concept is historicized through its connection with the idea of promise. Moreover, 'promise' historicizes the idea of blessing and gives to its cyclic view of history a progressive idea leading to a future fulfilment. The present is seen not as a repetition of the past but as the basis for a glorious future in the fulfilment of divine promises. 'Blessing' lacks a historical perspective, in that it does not look to a future fulfilment but becomes effective in unfolding its power in normal happenings from the moment of its utterance. Blessing is given as a promise in the patriarchal narratives and thereby acquires a historical orientation which it originally did not possess.¹⁵

The idea of promise is also refined by 'blessing'. 'Promise' calls for obedience and expectant waiting for the acts of the coming God, whereas 'blessing' calls for active cooperation with God in his action of creation. This is especially prominent in the fertility cults of Canaanite religion. Man is thought of as sharing in the divine activity of creation through taking part in the cultic fertility rites

14. G. Von Rad, *Genesis*, (OT Library; London; SCM press, 1972) p. 160. Cf. Thomas B. Dozeman, "Sperma Abroam in John 8 and Related Literature. Cosmology and Judgement", *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 42 (1980), p. 344.

15. Cf. P. V. Premsagar, art cit p. 115.

which ensure the divine creative power in nature. This idea turns the concept of promise into one of active cooperation between man and God. Abraham is called to cooperate with God in his promised salvation for Israel and for all the nations of the earth (Gen 12:2). This is the real purpose of the divine revelation and the announcement of promise, rather than merely stating his future plans and prospects. The concept of blessing emphasizes the active participation of the recipient of promise in the promised salvation and not merely passive reception of divine salvation. The Yahwist extends this participation to the peoples as well as through employing the Niphal of *brk*¹⁶.

Because of the influence of promise and blessing or the command and obedient response of the patriarch, the apparently arbitrary command for obedience turns into gracious work of God for the salvation of man. It is because God has a gracious plan for Israel and for the whole world that He commands them. The command is now interpreted as the call of God of the patriarch to co-operate with him in his plan to 'create' universal salvation¹⁷.

This mutual influence and enrichment of 'command', 'promise' and 'blessing' show the need of religious syncretism¹⁸. This does not mean that the religion of patriarch is a syncretic religion, there is the revelation guiding the syncretic process. Israel's confrontation with other religions led them to a better understanding of their own faith and to a more positive appreciation of the depth of the divine mystery concerning Israelite religion and other world religions.

Involvement with the Canaanite religion also helped the patriarchs to have a universal idea of salvation. Nomadic religion is a moving religion, heading to a new promise specially reserved for them. In that process as a

16. Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 115-116.

17. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

18. *Ibid.*

privileged people they 'arrogantly rejected' and passed by the others. They do not recreate the environment but pass by to have a new pastoral environment. But the sedentary religions on the other hand depend more on the creative blessing of God. They do not pass by but create and change the environment, the idea of creation is more prevalent in the minds of the Canaanites. As patriarchal nomadic religion comes into contact with the blessing idea of Canaanite religion there occurs a break-down of "the narrow particularism of the ideas of promise and election. The idea of creation connected with blessing makes all men equal in the sight of God". Altmann points out that in both J and E, Israel's election is drawn against the background of the primeval history. The idea of Yahweh as the creator and judge of people precedes the election of Israel. The election of Israel is not described as an original part of the plan of God at the time of creation; it was only a later arrangement in view of the disobedience of man¹⁹. If the patriarchs had got the idea of blessing because of their interrelationship with the Canaanite religions, probably it was only then that they came to the awareness of their own unique role of universal salvation. It is in the context of blessing that the role of Abraham as the father of nations is revealed.

Timely warning on blind interreligious adaptations

As we have seen, Abraham's story is filled with optimistic views concerning other nations and religions. Abraham's 'unassuming character' while relating to other 'religions' helped to have the growth of his own religion by interreligious 'adaptations'. But the sacred writer does not forget to remind us to maintain balance in interreligious dialogues'.

The threat to basic human values, in whatever form, in whichever religion or nation, has not only to be rejected but also condemned. The story of the 'volcanic

19. *Ibid.*, pp, 117-118

eruption' at Sodom and Gomorrah reveals two aspects concerning the interreligious relation. It shows one's need for the magnanimous attitude towards other religions and a heartfelt concern towards the prosperity of other nations: Abraham prays to spare Sodom and Gomorrah from Yahweh's wrath. But at the same time the sacred writer has no hesitation in condemning the religion or social practices that threaten the basic human values.

The story of the sacrifice of Isaac is mainly written to test the obedience of Abraham (Gen 22:1). But at the same time we cannot rule out totally the underlying message, the care one should take in adopting other religious practices. In that story there is the "rejection of child sacrifice, which was a feature of some types of 'El worship'"²⁰. Abraham is encircled by the inhuman religious practices of the land of Canaan. For him there was a lot of confusion concerning the 'interreligious adaptation' before he came to know the mind of Yahweh. The slow break from the corrupt pagan practices is depicted in the obedience story or rather 'temptation story' of Abraham. Some peoples of Canaan practised child sacrifice as though it were the divine command. In the time of Elisha (c. 800 BC), in a crisis of battle for his capital, the king of Moab "took his eldest son... and offered him for a burnt offering upon the wall" (2 Kings 3:27). "If men, worshipping pagan deities could carry their religion to that terrific cost, how could Abraham show that his religion meant as much to him. Only by being willing to go as far they did... He was a great soul living in a crude age. He saw people around him offering up their children to show their faith and obedience to the false gods. In spite of his human love he could not help hearing an inward voice asking him why he should not do as much; and because that thought seemed to press on his conscience

20. G. J. Wenham. "The Religion of the Patriarchs", in *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives*, ed. by A. R. William and D. J. Wiseman, (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980) p. 184.

he thought it was the voice of God. The climax of the story is the revelation that what the voice of God would ultimately say was something completely different from what Abraham supposed²¹. "Really Abraham proved his obedience to the will of Yahweh not to adopt the abominable inhuman practice, child sacrifices, of the people of Canaan. "Israel did, after all, almost alone of its compeers, raise its eyes to a vision of God and religions that relegated the otherwise respectable institution of human sacrifice to the dank backwaters of superstition and barbarism"²².

Thus the constant encounter with world religions will enable religions to raise their vision and consciousness, which will eventually enable the religions concerned to bring to light and reject the evil practices in them that hinder humanity's welfare and progress.

Conclusion

A close examination of the patriarchal narratives would reveal to us the mind of the sacred authors concerning the plurality of the religions of their times. But now the question is whether our approaches in the past — by enmity one trying to exterminate the other, by rivalry one trying to dominate over the other, by just tolerating the other, by a mere co-existence — were in tune with the patriarchal approaches to the plurality of religions. The vision of the author was far wider than ours. He visualised a real loving relationship where religions are always sharing their good things (blessings) with the other. As blessings are always from God, when they are participating in each others blessings they are ultimately acknowledging and participating in the gifts of the one God, in God Himself. The symbol of Abraham stimulates to hasten the process

21. Cuthbert A. Simpson, "Genesis", in *The Interpreters Bible* Vol 1, (New York: Abingdon Press. 1952) pp. 642- 643.

22. Bruce Vawter, *op. cit.* p. 256.

of mutual sharing of blessings of the world religions. In short in today's multi-religious context Abram is in the process of becoming Abraham!

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Israel's Attitude towards the Nations according to the Deuteronomistic Tradition

As in most cases concerning human relations, there was a wide gap between Israel's theory and practice, between the rigid dogma of complete separation from - if not annihilation of - the other nations and the mutual cross-fertilization and cultural transformation which are inevitable among peoples who occupy the same territory.

Although Yahwism can convincingly be proposed as a religion of nomads, not very well suited for a sedentary life after the conquest of Canaan, the origin of the confederation of the twelve tribes is not sufficiently known to lump them altogether and treat them in the same way.

The Yahwist is more closely connected with the Lea tribes¹, but it is not clear how many of them came into Palestine from the South, under the leadership of Caleb². The Elohist reflects rather the traditions of the Rachel tribes and those who crossed over near Jericho, along with Joshua

1. Lea means 'cow' and her tribes were supposed to be big cattle breeders while Rachel, 'ewe', is connected with small cattle breeders, sheep and goats.

1. cfr. the conquest of Hormah in Judg. 1: 17-21 and Nu 21:3. But Dt 2:44 and Nu 14:44 have another tradition i, e, Israel was routed!

the Ephraimite. As for the Deuteronomistic tradition, it has some affinity with the Northern kingdom and the Elohist, but we know as yet very little about such marginal tribes as Asher and Gad, Naphtaly and Dan, Zebulun and Issachar. These were late-comers to the federation and their ancestors might never have been in Egypt. They could have settled as sedentary people among the Canaanites long before the conquest and before their acceptance of Yahwism.

It is therefore with reservation that one can speak of transculturation from nomadic to agricultural life.

Another difficulty is the uncertainty about the redaction history of the Deuteronomistic literature³:

— the bulk of the 'Ur-Deuteronomium' could have been written as far back as the time of the Judges or the early monarchy, when the 'holy War' was still a reality.

— the historians of the school have had to cope with the revival of Ba'alism under v. g. Ahab and his Sidonite wife Jezebel (cfr. the cycles of Elijah and Elisha), but they also shared the enthusiasm of the reformers Asha, Hezekiah and especially Josiah, who not only restored Yahwism but had also expansionist dreams of renewed holy wars.

— the final redactor who incorporated Dt into the Pentateuch (400 BC) apparently did not introduce any radical change in the traditional material.

The deuteronomist's dogmatic teaching concerning other nations

The cornerstone of Deuteronomistic theology is the covenant proclaimed by Moses 'beyond the Jordan, in the land of Moab' (Dt 1:5).

Israel is chosen by YHWH as his very own ('am segullah', cfr. 7:6, 14:2), to be greater than the other nations and holy above all of them (7:6; 14:2; 28:18). He will give them Palestine as their inheritance and there-

3. cfr. Ind. Journ. of Theology XXVIII/3-4, July-Dec 1979 pp. 117f

fore will defeat and dispossess the seven great and mighty nations that are there (4:38; 31:3).

They have to be driven away and destroyed. As a devouring fire, YHWH will consume them. He will subdue them to Israel to be expelled and perish quickly (9:3; 11:24f). This is not because Israel is more righteous than these strange nations (9:4), but because of their abominable practices of worshipping wood and stone (29:17), passing their sons and daughters through fire, i. e. burning them inside the belly of the statue of Molech (12:31, 18:10, 1 Kg 16:3, 17:17, 21:6, 23:10), and all sorts of superstitions. Deuteronomy has a rich vocabulary concerning these practices. Dt 18:10f lists eight different aberrations: one who practices divination, soothsayer, augur, sorcerer, charmer, medium, wizard and necromancer!

But the historians could not ignore the fact that many inhabitants of Palestine were not exterminated. They give for this various explanations which are not all equally convincing:

--they had to be cleared away little by little, so that the vast country might not become underpopulated and infested by wild animals who render life insecure (7:22 and Ex 23:29 E).

--the Israelites have stopped trusting exclusively in YHWH and so were left to themselves, unable to conquer the whole territory and were thus punished by the presence of the previous inhabitants who were a trap, a scourge, a thorn in their eyes (Jos. 23:12f, Judg 2:3 + 22).

--if not a punishment, the Canaanites were to be a continuous source of temptation and a test of Israel's fidelity (Judg 2:22f and 3:4).

--having enemies in their midst provided a certain blessing in disguise: it kept the Israelite soldiers on their toes and they had a target to practise the art of war when new recruits were in need of military exercises! (Judg 3:2).

One text is very significant. Dt 20:14-18 states that the 'herem' (religious extermination) is not to be practised on people living far away from Palestine. From them, the victorious army should put all the males to the sword, but take as spoils the women, children and some of the livestock. This clearly indicates that the purpose of expelling other nations from Canaan was to keep Israel's faith intact, uncontaminated by the daily encounter with people of other religions!

The sojourner in their midst, the 'ger', was a special case. He enjoyed special protection and is often mentioned along with the Levites, the widows, the orphans and the needy.

Jos. 9:3-21 narrates how a group of people from around Gibeon deceived the Israelites, pretending to come from a very far-away country and thus could conclude a friendly alliance with the invaders. Israel's leaders could not go back on their word and allowed them to live in their midst as wood-cutters and water-carriers. There may be a historical event at the source of this episode but Dt 29:11 is an obvious anachronism: the sojourner in the camp 'who hews wood and draws water' is among those who concluded the covenant, in the land of Moab!

The 'gerim' might therefore be proselytes who have joined Israel, v. g., the 'mixed multitude' of run-aways from Egypt (Ex 12:38), the family of Rahab (Jos 2:14 + 6:25) and others.

Dieter Kellemann suggests that for the Deuteronomists the ger is a faithful Yahwist of the Northern kingdom who fled from the territory of Jeroboam I (I Chro 11:13-16) after the schism, or returned to Judah after the fall of Samaria (722 BC). They had left their possession behind and were reduced to the state of day-labourers, v. g. wood-cutters and water-carriers (Dt 14:24, 16:11 + 14, 24:14ff, 29:11...). Even the Levites who came to the South were more or less considered as 'gerim' and entitled to

a share of the tithes like the other protected citizens (14:29; 26:12, cfr also 18:6)⁴.

This would explain why sojourners could take part in religious feasts (5:14, 16:11 + 14) and listen to the reading of the law (31:12). YHWH loved them for their faithfulness (10:18f) and insisted that they be given a righteous verdict in court as any fellow-Israelite (1:16, 24:17, 27:19).

On the other hand, some texts seem to imply that the sojourner in question is not a member of the congregation and thus not required to observe the sacral laws of the covenanted community: According to Dt 14:21, he is allowed to eat of the 'nebelah', i. e., meat of what dies by itself without the blood being drained⁵.

In any case he was not financially well-off and is thus distinguished from the more prosperous foreigner ('nokeri') to whom the Israelites could sell such meat (14: 21) and give loans at interest (23:20). The indebted nokeri could not benefit from the year of release (15:3).

Among the curses which would follow a breach of the covenant' the Deuteronomist mentions that the 'gerim' will become more influential than the Israelites. The rejected congregation - 'qahal' - will be so badly off that they will have to go and beg a loan from these sojourners. The whole social set-up will be reversed, the gerim being

4. Theol. Dictionary of the OT, III p. 445

5. The Holiness Code (Lev. 17:15) does not make this distinction between the ger and the native. Basing himself on these two texts (D and P) concerning the nebelah-meat, Mcshe Weinfeld holds that the P tradition is more concerned with the holiness of the land and therefore every one who goes against the law of impurity defiles the land, whoever he be. But the Dtr links such holiness with the chosen people (nobless oblige) and these prohibitions do not apply to non-Israelites. On the other hand, P exempts the gerim from certain celebrations connected with the salvation history of the chosen people v. g. the feast of Booths (Lev. 23:42 versus Dt 16:4) because the ger did not travel along through the desert. Cfr M. Weinfeld, Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic school pg 230 ff.

the head and the Israelites the tail! (Dt 28:43f in contrast to 28:12 and 15:6).

This text too implies that the sojourners in question were not fellow-Israelites from the North and yet were accepted as residents.

Religious intransigence

With regard to religious practices, the Deuteronomist does not tolerate any compromise: When the Canaanite nations were defeated, they have to be utterly destroyed without mercy. There is no question of any alliance or marriage 'lest they turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods'. Altars have to be pulled down, pillars (symbols of male deities 'mitzbehoth') dashed to pieces and sacred posts (of female deities, 'asherim') hewn down and burned with fire. The hill shrines and all sanctuaries 'under every green tree' must be wiped out and the name of their gods erased from memory! (7:25, 12:2f etc...)

They should never be entrapped by the snares of inculturation. After having dispossessed and destroyed the Canaanite nations, they must not enquire about their gods and religious practices, 'how did these nations serve their gods that I may do likewise?' For every abominable thing which the Lord hates they have done... even sacrificed their children by passing them through the fire! Idol-worship and the service of other gods is 'a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit' (29:17f, 12:30, also 18:10f).

Apparently, the attraction of the fertility rites persisted long after the conquest and became very acute after the marriage of Ahab with Jezebel and the official sanction of the cult of Ba'al (1 Kg 16:30-33 and 18:18f). It was in this context that Elijah appeared. He was true to his name: Eli-Yahu, i. e., My God is YHWH and not Ba'al! It is YHWH who gives rain and fertility to the fields. To prove his point, he first sent a drought, closing heaven for several years (1 Kg 17:1) and then challenged the prophets of Ba'al to an open contest on mount Carmel: Who was the true God who could kindle fire to burn the wood of the

sacrifice and send rain to end the drought? YHWH alone (1 Kg 18:20-45)⁶. All the prophets of Ba'al were put to death. Such was the dogmatic intolerance of the law-givers! There are however a couple of remarkable passages which seem less hostile towards other religions:

Dt 4:19 forbids the worship of sun and moon to the Israelites, but YHWH allows it for other nations: 'Beware lest you lift up your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and worship them, and serve them, things which the Lord your God has allotted to all the people under the whole heaven'!

II Kg 17:24-28 deals with other people from Babylon and Eastern states who had been exiled into Samaria to replace those taken away by Sargon II in 722 BC. They were harassed by lions because they did not know how to worship the God of the land! Some priests from among the Israelite exiles should be sent back to teach the newcomers the law of the God of the land, the way to worship YHWH!

The first text admits at least implicitly that YHWH approves of solar worship by non-Israelites while the second accepts the fact of inculturation in religious matter, inasmuch there is 'a God of the land'.

If we analyse some of the laws and customs of the Deuteronomists, we find that in practice there was a good amount of transculturation.

6. J. N. M. Wijngaards has made an interesting study of the formula 'You shall not bow down to them' and serve them' (Ex 20:5a and Dt 5:9a) the *IJTh* XVIII/2-3, April-Sept. 1969 pp. 180-90. Though both verbs *hishthawai* (bow down) and *'abad* (serve) are used separately also in connection with YHWH, When they occur together as one formula, they always refer to other gods and more particularly to the Canaanite Ba'al. It is more than an ordinary act of worship and seems to imply a rite of adherence v. g. Ahab would have renounced YHWH and formally acknowledged his allegiance to Ba'al by a ceremony of bowing to Ba'al's statue and declaring himself Ba'al's servant. The prohibitive formula might have originated as an E and D reaction against the

Canaanite elements in religious worship and legislation

Josiah's celebration of the Passover in 622 is considered a restoration of the covenantal feast, as it was held from its origin till 'the time of the Judges' (II Kg 23:21-23). Unfortunately, the text does not give any description of it: no word is mentioned about either the lamb or the unleavened bread⁷.

The Pascal lamb whose blood was smeared on the doorposts to avert evil, came from an old nomadic custom to inaugurate a new grazing season. The purpose was to placate evil powers and prevent diseases, drought, or danger from wild beasts. A one-year-old male lamb was taken in order to restore vigour to the divinity and thus ensure further fertility for the flock. Both the Priestly tradition (Ex 12:7) and the Yahwist (Ex 12:22f) have connected this ritual of blood with the tenth plague, but the Deuteronomist seems to ignore this rite. Dt 16:4 mentions the 'flesh of the sacrifice' and in the so-called proto-deuteronomium (Ex 12:24-27 and 13:1-16), the lamb is offered either as the first-born of the cattle or as substitute, to redeem the first-born sons, i. e., a Canaanite custom!

The feast of the unleavened bread is also of agricultural origin. At the first harvest, no leaven, i. e., no dough from the previous batch is used to bake the first loaves of thanksgiving and it is only after seven days that the new dough has been sufficiently fermented to act as leaven. The feast was one of thanksgiving and renewal, breaking away from the fermentation (impurity) of the past year.

Both the Elohist (Ex 12:34+39) and the Deuteronomist (Dt 16:3) attribute the unleavened bread to the hurry of

Baalism of Omri's dynasty and then been added in earlier Dtr text 'I Kg 16:31, 22:53, Dt 8:19, 11: 16, 29:25f, 30:17, Jos 23:7 Judg. 2.19, (Kg 9:6 etc ...).

7. The Chronicler (II Chr 35:1-19) speaks of Josiah's going back to the days of Samuel, mentioning both the lamb (v. 1) and the unleavened bread (v. 17) Both both elements are already mentioned at the time of a previous reformer, Hezekiah (II Kg 30:17-21).

the flight at the time of the exodus, 'the bread of affliction', but in doing so they suppress the religious significance of thanksgiving and renewal.

It might have been as late as Josiah's time that the original feasts were fused together: the blood ritual of the nomads (in J and P), the redemption of the first-born and the thanksgiving at the first grain harvest⁸.

Two other agricultural feasts were taken over from the Canaanites: the feast of weeks and the feast of the Tabernacles.

The feast of Weeks (Pentecost=fiftieth) was to celebrate the first-fruits of the barley harvest, the ingathering. All had to take part in the rejoicing. In Dt 16:12 it is only loosely connected with 'the sojourn in Egypt', but later on it will commemorate the giving of the Law on mount Sinai.

The feast of Booths (Tabernacles) referred to the days of vintage when the harvesters were living in tents, chasing away the birds and gathering the grapes. At the end of it, there was a pilgrimage to the sanctuary and every one including the labourers, were to go along. It was the feast of the year both in the North and in the South (IKg 8:2+65 and 12:32). The Holiness Code tries to convert it into a commemoration of the wandering in the desert (Lev 23:39-43).

Such attempts at transforming agricultural feasts into religious commemoration of salvation history were apparently not too successful. The theories of the temple pandits could not be as deep-rooted as the day-to-day events of the farmer's life.

The 'tithes' or 'tenth' of all the produce of the land (Dt 14:22-29, 26:12-15) is probably of Palestinian or Phoe-

8. II Chr. 30 speaks of the feast of the unleavened bread... with the passover lamb! If it was so under Hezekiah, one fails to see what was new in Josiah's celebration of the combined feasts (II Chr 36:17f: the Passover and the feast of unleavened bread). E (Ex 23:15) and J (Ex 34:38) do not join the two.

nician origin: 'aser(ten) comes from the root -'s-r which in Ugaritic can also mean 'pouring out', 'offering'⁹. The offering was to be taken to the sanctuary during the feast of Booths at the end of the harvest and vintage. Since the redemption of the first-born took place on the same occasion, the firstling of the herd and flock (Dt 14:23) was added to the precept.

Every third and sixth year after the sabbatical one, during which the fields remained fallow, the tithes were not taken to the temple but distributed at home among the Levites, gerim, widows and orphans (Dt 14:28f, 26:12ff). This special offering to the protected citizens is not mentioned outside Dt and might have been taken from a local custom.

Some Canaanite practices had to be adapted and purified before being incorporated into Deuteronomy:

The case of a person found murdered without a clue as to who could be the culprit (Dt 21:1-9) created a special problem: the blood had to be avenged but indiscriminate retaliation avoided. According to a non-Israelite custom, a young heifer had to be sacrificed by the elders at an ever-flowing stream and an incantation of exculpation said. For the Deuteronomist the breaking of the neck was not considered a sacrifice (Is 66,3 against Ex 34: 20) and the ever-flowing stream was not a path to the underworld. Levitic priests are brought in as witnesses and a prayer in Deuteronomistic style is added asking that the guilt of innocent blood be averted from Israel (v.8)¹⁰.

The philanthropic concession to newly married men or to people who had just bought a field or built a house, exempting them from military service in time of war, was

9. cfr. H. Cazelles, *La dime esraélite et les textes de Ras Shamra*, V.T. 1 (1951) p. 131.

10. cfr. J. N. M. Wijngaards' *Dutch commentary on Deuteronomium*, *Boeken van het Oude Testament II* / III pp. 220-25.

originally a Canaanite taboo, now purified from its magic element and superstitious fear (Dt 20:5-7 and 24:5). The regulation belongs to the laws of Holy War: every soldier should be in full possession of himself and his energy¹¹. Not only would the mind of such people be miles away from military action, but their fear and anxiety would affect the morale of the rest of the army. H. Gunkel and A. F. Puuko allude to magic powers of the fertility gods, possessing the new husband or new owner of the field or vineyard until this energy is released by fertilization. As for the new house, the anger and curse of the house-gods could be incurred if the owner did not occupy the building after the dedication ceremony.

A similar humanitarian interpretation has been given to the custom of leaving some stray sheaves or grapes after harvesting (Dt 24:19-22). Originally these were supposed to be an offering to restore the fertility of the fields; now they are left as gleanings for the needy.

The command to bury the corpse of a man who had been impaled, 'hanged on a tree', before sunset (Dt 21:22f), was originally motivated by fear that the spirit of the dead man would wander around and harm the living as soon as darkness fell and the power of evil was released. The spirit was restless as long as the corpse was not in a tomb. For Deuteronomy, the motivation is rather not to prolong unduly the public exposure, a sign of a divine curse¹².

Some other prohibitions are simply listed without giving any reason or explanation.

The forbidden combinations of 22:9-11 probably referred to Canaanite magic practices of cross-fertilization, or cross-sterilization, going against the inviolable order of

11. Hence also the abstention from sex starting three days before the battle and lasting as long as the army was encamped in the open battle field. Cfr. II Sam 00:00, I Sam 21:6 etc ...

12. The early Church was impressed by this text: Jesus crucified was cursed so that we be blessed! Cfr Gal. 3:13 Acts 5:30, 13:39...

nature (Lev. 19:19). The cloth of mixed material, wool and linen, is a symbolic crossing of animal and vegetable fibres.

The forbidden tassels at the corner of the shawl (22:12) symbolized magic horns to repel the evil spirits of the night¹³.

Boiling a kid in its mother's milk was obviously a magic sacrifice to enhance the fertility of the cattle (Dt 14:21, cfr also Ex 23:19 E and Ex 34:26 J).

The stone pillars of Ba'al and the posts of Asherah were obviously ruled out as abominations and those who took part in their worship were to be executed (Dt 7:25' 13:5, 17:2-7, 18:9-14). But in Jerusalem the cult of Nehushtan, the Jebusite snake-god had somehow been tolerated and even justified by the tradition of the bronze snake (Nu 21:8 J-E). Even Isaiah described the Seraphim¹⁴ in his inaugural vision (Is 6:2 + 6f). But the Deuteronomist historian was less tolerant: one of the first measures taken by the reformist king Hezekiah was to destroy this Nehushtan, to whom 'the people had burned incense' (II Kg 18:4).

It is also remarkable that in their evaluation of the Jerusalem kings the Deuteronomists always referred to foreign cult. Those who deserved praise had taken some measures to curtail sacred prostitution, idolatry and foreign cults. But as a sad refrain they add each time that the king did not fully eradicate the bamoth, i. e., the cult on the shrines¹⁵.

But the historians have no objection to the trade agreement with Hiram, the king of Tyre: Both David and Salomon got timber from him for the building of the palace and the temple (ISam 5:11 ff, I Kg 5:1-12 and 9:10-14). Salomon

13. P allowed them, as reminder of our obligation to observe the Law, Nu 15:37f.

14. Seraph, from s-r-ph, sting¹⁴, burning, hence serpent.

15. Cfr especially Asha (I Kg 15:12ff), also Jehosaphat (I Kg 22:43), Joash (II Kg 12:3), Amaziah (II Kg 14:4), Azariah (II Kg 15:4) and Jotham (II Kg 15:35).

and Hiram seem to have had a common merchant navy plying from Ezion-Geber as far as Tarshish¹⁶ and Ophir (IKg 10:11 + 22f).

Another Hiram¹⁶, a skilled bronze-smith, was entrusted with all the metal work of the temple: the pillars, the molten sea, stands, lavers etc... (IKg 7:13-50) and there is no doubt that he introduced many Phoenician motifs and emblems incompatible with strict Yahwism. The two bronze pillars have been variously interpreted as, v.g., phallic symbols or altars containing cosmic fire¹⁷. The twelve oxen of the molten sea (7:25), the lions, oxen and cherubim of the ten stands (v. 29) are but a few clear transgressions of the prohibition to make molten images!

The Deuteronomists did not fully consent to Salomon's enterprises and had already criticized the 'ways of the king' in the anti-monarchic narrative of Samuel (ISam 8:10-18). They further condemned his various alliances and marriages with foreign princesses who poisoned the atmosphere and turned his heart away from YHWH. IKg 11:1-10 repeats six times that his heart was no longer 'true to the Lord'.

But Israel wanted to be a nation, to have a king like the other peoples and had to be exposed to the ways of non-Israelites. The alternative of remaining self-centred would only lead to sterility and oblivion as is more or less exemplified by the Rechabites and their cultural archaism (Jer. 35:6-11 etc.).

Humanitarian attitude

In spite of their rigid theory and in line with their less rigid practice, the Deuteronomists showed at times a deep-rooted concern for the needy and a sincere respect for the feelings and dignity of human persons.

16. This Hiram is the son of a widow of Naphtali and a man from Tyre. 11 Chr 2:14 calls him Hiram-abi, son of a woman of Dan.

17. Cfr. W. F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, pp. 144-48.

A run-away slave should not be handed back to his master, but given refuge and shelter against oppression (Dt 23:15f).

A woman captive, found attractive by her master, must first be allowed to mourn her dead husband and relatives for a full month, without any restrictions on her apparel and other customary practices (21:10-13). Then he can take her as his wife.

The wages of sojourners and other labourers must be paid each day before nightfall. They must neither be oppressed nor discriminated against in the court (24:14f +17).

In these contexts of the poor, Deuteronomy often refers to the fact that the Israelites themselves have been slaves in Egypt and know from experience what ill-treatment means (Dt 5:15, 10:19, 16:12, 23:7, 24:18+22).

There is even a certain concern for nature. During a long siege or after the victory, no fruit trees should be destroyed in enemy territory, since it would take years to replace them (20:19f)¹⁸.

Some conclusions

From the previous considerations a few conclusions may be drawn:

a— The Deuteronomists remained uncompromising with regard to their basic allegiance to YHWH. He was their covenantal Lord to be loved at the cost of everything else.

b— If other nations were a threat to this faith of Israel they had to be expelled from the land which YHWH had given to his chosen people as an inheritance or destroyed.

18. This restriction might have been inspired by an utilitarian outlook as v. g. the command to spare the mother bird when robbing the eggs or the young ones (Dt 22:6). But the added promise of prosperity and long life, as a reward for it, at least suggests a nobler motivation.

c— Many religious practices of these other nations were considered as abominations to the Lord and incompatible with the Yahwist way of worship.

d— Nevertheless, the Israelites did assimilate quite a few religious customs of the Canaanites. As a rule, they first had to purify them and they tried to relate them to their own salvation history. But this alteration and re-interpretation often diminished the appeal and the value of these religious observances.

e— In spite of their dogmatic intolerance, the Deuteronomists showed in practice a great regard and concern for other people, especially the displaced persons and marginal ones, and they respected the dignity of individuals.

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The Prophets and the Nations

No people, and for that matter no religion, is an island. Every people evaluates itself and its religion against other peoples and other religions. The Old Testament Prophets were no exception. In the defeat and destruction of their enemies they saw divine vindication. In full solidarity with their suffering brethren they thirsted for vengeance upon the oppressors; they rejoiced exceedingly at the fall of their formidable enemies. By announcing doom on them Israel's prophets gave hope to their intimidated people. At the same time the goodness they saw in the nations prodded them on to chide Israel for her big claims and wretched life. This vision brought from them oracles concerning the conversion of the gentiles.

Israel and the nations around her thrived and thrashed on the stage of history. Being a people on a very low rung of intellectual development Israel's bards and seers reflected along with them on history. In the breaks and bursts of history this helpless people saw God at work. Through the experience of holy wars early Israel discovered Yahweh, her national god, as the unrivalled lord of history. But the prophets saw how the world powers, Assyria, Babylon and Persia, were changing the course of history with their politics often to the discomfiture of Israel and presumably also of her god. If Isaiah helped Israel's faith out of this quandary by elevating Yahweh, Israel's warrior god, to the status of god the creator, thereby making him sovereign of all peoples. Reflection on historical faith was cudgelled by the upheavals of world-politics. In such a texture of theological thinking, learning and speaking, the prophets of Israel were more engrossed in the defence and acclaim of their own religion than in enthusiastic search for ecumenical rapprochement with other religions. This is the overall pic-

ture obtained when the various prophetic themes on foreign nations are pieced together.

Moral indignation

Amos, the first classical prophet of Israel speaks quite amply of the nations. The prophet denounces several nations for cruel war crimes. Not all of them are cases of crimes against Israel (e. g., the oracle against Moab in Am. 2:1). What the prophet here gives vent to is righteous moral indignation at atrocities against humans — a religious sentiment and reaction which the prophet shares with any man practising any brand whatsoever of ethical religions. Besides, these oracles strategically preface the oracle against Israel (Am. 2:6-16) and serve to highlight this devastating prophetic onslaught on the prophet's own fellow-religionists. Amos is thus interested mainly in Israel and his oracles against the nations answer but the tactics of successful preaching. With the same prophetic aim Amos puts Israel on par with the Philistines, Syrians and apparently also the Ethiopians in the matter of divine guidance and providence over national history (Am. 9:7). In all these Amos is not an ecumenist, but God's prophet in and for Israel.

There are many oracles against foreign nations, which give also the motive or reason for divine punishment. The most frequently mentioned motive is pride, manifesting itself in diverse ways. Tyre is accused of pride to be like god (Ez. 28:1ff); this hybris is nourished and manifested by the nation's renowned craftsmanship (Ez. 27:4ff), unrighteous trade (Ez. 28:18) and national exultation (Ez. 26:17. cf. Is 23:6-12). A non-genuine Isaianic oracle coming from this same time, profers the same motive against Babylon (Is. 14.11ff). Moab is accused of pride, arrogance and boast (Is. 16:6; Jer 48:28-33). Egypt vaunts itself as the dragon which created the Nile (Ez. 29:3ff) or is herself the proud Nile (Jer. 46:18): she is a dragon and a lion that harms others (Ez. 32:2) and has the pride of a stately cedar (Ez 13:3ff). Pride can lead one to defy God (Jer 50:29); it can

arise due to wisdom (Is 19:11ff), beauty (Ez 28:17), show itself in revelry (Is 23:13) and indulge itself in violence (Ez 28:16). God will punish the pride of the nations as he punished the pride of Edom (Ob. 3). That God will punish the haughty and bring down the arrogant, seems to have been an axiom of Israel's exilic and post-exilic ethos as can be inferred from the several general statements to this effect (Is. 13:11; Jer 50:31ff). The fall of the mighty Babylonian empire must have helped Israel's prophets to reassert this truth with greater emphasis. Speaking of Assyria's blasphemous boast, Isaiah had already proclaimed this message (Is 10:18). A small nation witnessing the defeat and fall of many mighty ones can easily arrive at the belief in a god who will put down the mighty from their thrones and exalt those of low degree (Lk. 1:52).

No reliance except on Yahweh

Faith in Yahweh was understood by Israel as a rigorously exclusive reliance on him. The tiny nation of Israel was always under the temptation of taking refuge and seeking protection under the mighty arm of one of the contemporary superpowers. Prophets were not politicians. As men of faith, they knew that God alone could give safety and security to Israel. For this Israel should avoid pacts with pagan military powers. More emphatically than any other prophet of the Old Testament, it was Isaiah who formulated and inculcated this uncompromising demand of faith (cf. Is. 7:9b). He warned king Achaz against going to Assyria for help (Is 7). He warned Hezekiah against forming an anti-Assyrian coalition with the help of Egypt and Ethiopia (Is 20). The futility of going down to Egypt for military help forms the motif of his theology of faith in chs 30 and 31. Hosea chides the northern kingdom for political promiscuity, senselessly going, now to Egypt, now to Assyria (Hos. 7:11). Egypt, the oppressor during the Mosaic period, was always a potential ally and an actual instigator during the Assyrian and Babylonian periods. The oracles against Egypt (Is 19:1-15; Jer 46; Ez. 29-32) drive home to Israel the folly of seeking help from the Pharaohs, because Egypt is doomed to fall.

Exclusive reliance on Yahweh in times of national peril was but a corollary of Old Testament's severe stand against idolatry. Idolatry committed by Israel is denounced as highly blameworthy; but the prophets do not treat the idolatry of the foreign nations as sin against Yahweh. When Isaiah sarcastically speaks of the Egyptians frantically consulting idols, sorcerers, mediums and wizards (Is. 19:3) he is teaching Israel how futile and foolish a thing it is to consult mediums and wizards (cf. Is. 8:19). The defeat of the gods of Moab and Babylon is part of the description of their nations' fall and is not presented as the wages of their idolatry (Jer. 48:13; 50:2; 48:35). Similarly, prophets, virulent attack on fertility cult, so universal in all religions, was to deter Israel from indulging herself in such abominable practices. The focus of prophetic teachings against idolatry, fertility cult and all forms of syncretism was on Israel and not on the nations and their sins.

Yahweh's rod

The lordship of Yahweh over all the nations of the earth was a belief that the prophets inherited from Israel's holy war traditions. As the commander of all, Yahweh can summon a nation to punish his own people Israel for her transgressions and apostasy. Already Amos, the first classical prophet, announced how Yahweh will use the nations against Israel (Am. 3:11; 6:14). Isaiah coins the classical expression of Yahweh wielding Assyria as the rod of his anger against the godless nation of Israel (Is. 10:5ff). In the first part of this poem (10:5-11), Assyria is God's instrument although this pagan nation does not know God's purpose for him and thinks that he is acting in his own military might to fulfil his ambition. The Assyrian monarch goes to the extent of defying and ridiculing Yahweh. The second part of the poem (10:13-19) speaks how God will punish Assyria for its presumption.

Yahweh who used the nations to punish Israel (cf. also Is. 7:17ff; 8:5ff; Hab. 1:6ff etc) will use yet other nations to save and restore her (Is. 45:1ff; 49:22ff; 60:10ff).

Two such instrumental saviours have been hailed with highly significant religious titles. Thus Nebuchadnezzar is called Yahweh's Servant (cf. Jer. 27:6) and Cyrus Yahweh's Anointed (Is. 45:1). Jeremiah, or the man who accorded the Babylonian emperor the title 'Servant', was heart and soul with the powerful pro-Babylonian lobby in Judah. The title is an index more to the heat of political campaigning than to high ecumenical overture; for the Book of Jeremiah wishes for the ultimate destruction of Babylon and not for its monumentalisation (cf. Jer 50). People languishing in utter humiliation, total helplessness and nostalgic yearning for repatriation from the Babylonian exile, naturally got aroused to tiptoe expectation at the comet-like rise of Cyrus. They hailed the Persian prince as Yahweh's anointed, not out of broadminded religious camaraderie, but out of effervescent hope for their own liberation.

In this context the case of prophet Ezechiel deserves special mention. Although this prophet, in the first part of his prophetic ministry, preached with all his psychical might about the fall of Jerusalem at the hands of Babylon, he did not accord the Babylonians or their king any religious distinction. As the son of Buzi, an important priest of Jerusalem, Ezechiel could not inherit any Jeremiahic pro-Babylonian political stand. As the prophet of Jerusalem's doom he had to struggle hard to subdue his inner attachment to the holy city, which, to every Jerusalemite was the delight of his eyes and the desire of his soul (Ez. 24:21). Such a prophet could not acclaim Babylon as God's Servant. Strange in this perspective is the absence of oracles against Babylon in the collection of Ezechiel's oracles against the foreign nations! In the latter part of his ministry Ezechiel was the prophet of hope; he has glowing descriptions of the new temple of Jerusalem, but no word of doom on Babylon, the demolisher of the holy city and its temple. Certainly prophets were not led by mere political or psychological logic. The man who called Jerusalem "the bloody city" had the trauma of the prophet in him overcoming the priest in him; so great

was his love for Jerusalem and so writhing had to be his struggle to muster the ardour to proclaim its fall with mighty words and many symbolic actions. This trauma was not undone by a counter-trauma in which the prophet would have had to blaze up high-tension revulsion against and hatred towards Babylon, the agent through whose action his dire predictions concerning Jerusalem had come true. Indeed, Ezechiel is strange in more than one way.

Yahweh uses the nations as his instrument not only with regard to the woe or weal of Israel, but also for striking other nations as well (Is 13:17ff, 21-22; Jer. 46:48, 51; Ez. 26: 29-32). All the oracles of this type arise after the traumatic experience of the exile. Israel's experience of history and her vision of the interaction of nations reached a peak. Every turn in world politics was full of forebodings. Peoples and nations got inextricably intertwined among themselves. Naturally Israel's way of understanding God and speaking about him received universalistic overtones. The therapy through catastrophe tempered her nationalistic particularism in politics and religion.

Vengeance on the nations

Except perhaps for the short respite during the reigns of David and Solomon, Israel was always a tiny nation scared of enemies. Curses were weapons of self-defence for the helpless man in the ancient near east. The prophets of Israel, with their oracles of doom against enemy nations, gave fortitude and hope to their oppressed fatherland. The kingdoms of Judah and Israel, debilitated through mutual strife, powerless against the other nations and harassed by them, are given hope by predicting to them amity between these divided kingdoms, joint military expeditions by them into the neighbouring nations and the return of the exiles from Assyria (Is. 11:14ff). The taunt against Babylon, also interpolated into the Book of Isaiah (Is. 14), is understandable at a time when Judah was languishing under Babylon. In the same way, Oracles against Babylon in the Book of Jeremiah (Jer. 50-51) also pre-

suppose the experience of Babylonian suzerainty. When such oracles were fulfilled, Israel's joy was expressed in songs over the downfall of the once mighty! Thus Nahum sang over the fall of Assyria. II Isaiah spoke plastically of the crunch on Babylon (Is. 43:14; 45:14; 47:1ff). Obadiah sets himself against Edom and the picture of Yahweh the avenger coming from Edom with blood-stained garments is grisly (Is 63:1ff). Only those who have suffered inhuman treatment and saw with their eyes how their dear and near ones were victims of exultant brutalities by revelling enemies can understand Israel's thirst and prayer for vengeance on her enemies (cf. Jer 49-51; Ez 25-28; Ob. 10; Ps. 137 etc). What Israel felt most humiliating and unforgetably unbearable was the derision heaped on her by the enemies (cf. Lam' 2:15-16). Naturally they yearned for the day when these mockers in turn will be mocked (Zeph. 2:8ff; Jer. 48:27, 39; Jer. 51:34-35; Ez. 25-28 etc). Prophets of comfort assured them that their present humiliation shall be turned into domination over the enemies (Is. 14:1-2; 60:10, 14, 16; 16:5ff.); tables shall be turned and it will be the turn of Israel to taunt others (Is. 14:4 against Lam. 1:21 & 2:15) and gleefully bewail over them (Jer. 48:31ff; 50:8). Egypt shall be punished for having been a mirage to Israel in time of grim need (Ez. 29:3ff).

Conversion of the nations

If humiliation and depredation at the hands of the nations set Israel burning with revengeful feelings, years of life on alien land which brought to most of them great possessions and high positions as is evidenced in the case of Ezdras, Nehemiah, Esther and even Daniel, opened Israel's heart and mind to the place and goal of the foreign nations in the plan of God. Almost all the oracles which speak of the conversion of the gentiles come from the post-exilic period. The vision of the nations flocking on pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Is. 2:2-4 = Mic. 4:1-4) probably do not belong to this trend of thought, but is to be traced back to the triumphalistic theology of Zion reaching back to its Jebusite period. The picture of pagans bringing offer-

ings to Israel's God (Is. 18:7; 19:18,25; 60:5-7; Zeph.. 3:9-10) is quite understandable against the desire for religious expansion so natural to a religion boasting of high faith' but compelled to subscribe to the cultural and military superiority of others. Even the famous prophecy of Malachi (Mal.1:11) is not inspired positively by the holiness or acceptability of the pagans, their cult or prayers, but rather by the prophet's disdain and revulsion at the laxity of Judah's priests. Moral indignation towards Israel and emphasis upon the essentials of post-exilic religion goaded III Isaiah to pronounce welcome to foreigners and eunuchs into the religion and ministry of Israel (Is. 56:3ff; 65:11 66:18ff). In the heyday of Israelite monarchy Yahwist, the court theologian of Jerusalem, prophesied that all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by Abraham (Gen.12:3) and proved by his salvation history that the nations of the then known earth received their god-willed blessing when they were under the rule of Yahweh's chosen one, the king in Jerusalem. III Isaiah, speaking from another context and with the heritage of the entire tortuous salvation history on his heart and mind, was in a better position to understand the nature of God blessing the nations or the nations coming to Israel's God for blessing.

Universalism fully christian and catholic (not Roman Catholic please!) in concept is seen in the Servant Songs. The mission of the servant is to bring forth justice to the nations (Is. 42:1); and people of the earth expectantly hope for his law (Is. 42:4). The Servant is given as a light to the nations so that God's salvation may reach to the end of the earth (Is. 49:6). Through his vicarious sufferings and ignominious death the Servant made himself an offering for sin, interceded for the transgressors and made many to be accounted righteous (Is. 53). The Servant Songs are the only place where we have the spirit and picture of Christian kenosis for serving and saving others. The so-called universalism of II Isaiah is saturated through and through with triumphalism!

Post-exilic separatism

If contact with the foreign nations opened up Israel's mind to universalism during the exilic period reaching a high water-mark in the Servant Songs, the post-exilic period was mostly characterised by separatistic radicalism. Haggai, Zechariah, Ezra and Nehemiah represent this trend. The purpose of the Book of Ruth is not to boast of foreign blood in Israel's ancestry, but, on the contrary, to purge a particular tradition regarding David's ancestry of its foreign blemish. For this, Ruth is thoroughly Israelised (Ruth 1:16; 4:17). The Books of Esther, Judith, Daniel and the Maccabees show how rigorous fidelity to Israelite religious taboos are praised.

Historically

Those periods in history in which Israel had but God alone to cling to, bereft of religio-national laws, beliefs and institutions, reveal a healthy openness of spirit for enriching and enlivening rapport with others. The bondage in Egypt, the wanderings in the wilderness and the early centuries of settlement in Palestine prior to the monarchical period were years during which diverse religio-ethnic groups with their traditions fused and coalesced to form the people and religion of Israel. The monarchical period attempted mostly syncretism, military alliances and cultural enhancement to the detriment of traditional religion. Exile was a second wilderness, in which Israel once again became transparent to enrichment from others. The pre-exilic prophets inveighed against syncretism and social injustice; in the post-exilic period Haggai and Zechariah advocated separatism; Malachi too stands in this ritualistic particularism. III Isaiah from the post-exilic period and II Isaiah from the exilic period voice universalism, the former out of indignation towards faithless Israel and the latter out of sympathy and solidarity with stricken Israel. The author of the Book of Jonah makes a caricature of Israel's ancient faith to correct his contemporaries for the big discrepancy between their faith and life; his pat on fictitious Assyria is in reality a re-

buke on Israel; yet, in choosing Assyria as contrast to hypocritical Israel, the author reflects the broadmindedness and universalism acquired during the exile and lingering in the tradition represented by III Isaiah. It is this trend of the post-exilic period which announces bliss to the nations (cf. Jer. 46:26; 48:47; 49:6, 39). Punishment and eventual restoration was the pattern of prophetic message on sinful Israel. By using the same pattern in oracles against the foreign nations, the writer proclaims his faith in the medicinal nature of divine punishment, be it on Israel or on others. As an exceptionally ethical religion, Yahwism's admonition to be just and hospitable to "the strangers within your gates" (Ex. 22:21; 23:9; Dt 1:16; 10:18f) runs throughout her history receiving varying emphases as particular historical contexts demanded. The prophets played their role in the course of this history as bearers of tradition, interpreters of contemporary events and mouthpiece both of God and people, making the Word speak in the relevance of life.

Not inculturation, but prophetic commitment

Every prophet was a child of his own religio-cultural times. What was always paramount to them was attachment and concern for their own people and religion as the conscience of the nation. Precisely in their function as conscience, this concern never gave way to connivance or complacency. In announcing doom to the nations for their pride, the prophets voiced and thereby strengthened one basic Israelite concept of God's moral nature; in proclaiming nations as Yahweh's rod, they threatened sinful Israel in order to bring about her return to true religion; in contrasting recalcitrant Israel with really or supposedly better pagans, the message was put across to Israel to amend her ways; in announcing ruin and vengeance on enemy nations prophetic patriotism and solidarity bubbled up in the crucible of national pain and shame; joy over the fall of the enemy was its understandable sequel; in visualizing the march of the pagans to the God of Israel, religious triumphalism and expansionism got articulated.

In all these Israel's prophets were not inculturists but nationalists with a religious mission. The oracles concerning the nations and those against them were uttered in Israel. The prophets apparently were least interested whether they heard of what was spoken about them. In most cases the foreign nations did not hear of it at all. Isaiah spoke against Assyria and Egypt in Judah; Amos spoke against many nations; Ezekiel spoke against Tyre. All the prophets were firmly set on the soil and in the soul of Israel. They saw to it that Israel heard and understood their prophetic judgements and predictions about other peoples. It was always for the sake of Israel that they spoke.

Justice, righteousness, faithfulness, steadfast love, kindness and other moral virtues received great emphasis in the preaching of the prophets. Faith in Yahweh and exclusive worship of him was not for increasing or procuring the cultic glory of Yahweh, but for demanding, fostering and promoting righteousness in life. Syncretism, military pacts, idolatry etc. were attacked by the prophets not because they derogated from Yahweh's personal glory, but because they dragged the people into the abominations of fertility cult, into the stupidity of worshipping mute, lifeless man-made idols and brought about the consequent degeneration of religion from moral life to cultic legalism to the domination of the priestly class and the victimisation of the masses. Israel's prophets were valiant heroes who accompanied and assisted their people and religion exhorting them to avoid pitfalls and get back to the right track whenever they swerved away. When exile razed to the ground religio-political pyramid and when Israel lived solely on divine mercy, she could get a better understanding of her own mission towards the gentiles.

Message for today

A religion which is not true to itself will not have a healthy and enriching relationship with other peoples and their religions. Only those prophets who help and bludgeon their own people and religion to authenticity and

genuineness will be able to enlighten and enrich them through healthy rapport with other peoples and religions. What we witness today, especially in India, is a mosaic of religions, all poles apart from their respective ideals and goals. Islam, Hinduism and Christianity have become sects, indulging themselves mainly in cult of the deities, cult of religious authorities and performing works of philanthropy, not out of love for the poor, but for credit, in terms both of money and fame, to their own religious establishments. Since the times and spirit of religious expansionism and political colonialism have waned down to near extinction, the slogans of the day are religious dialogue, ecumenism, inculturation and a host of like-meaning cliches. An unholy confluence and an unconscious collusion mutually confirming similarly perverse religions in their spiritual debauchery is the picture drawn large on the religious canvas of India. Hinduism believes in divine incarnations at times of great global perils. Islam arose from Mohammed who preached charity towards poor brethren. Christianity glories in the God who took the form of a slave to die the death of a criminal. But today all these three religions organise mammoth pilgrimages, set up holy shrines and times, thrive through pompous cult, demand and collect money from the lay folk and bluff the unenlightened with sophisticated teachings. All religions of the world stand today in dire need of prophets. Only regenerated and authentic religions will be able to enter into enriching dialogue and communion among themselves. Perverse and apostate as they are today, their attempts at dialogue without self-reform would be further and deeper confirmation in depravity under the camouflage of interreligious communion!

Prophets in and for the religions of today will of necessity be men of moral indignation because of institutionalized religious hypocrisy in their respective religions; they will thirst for vengeance on seeing the discrimination and exploitation of the weaker castes; they will yearn for the union and communion of the high and low, Hindus and Christians, Moslems and Hindus, Christians and Moslems; they will have their eyes open to the changes in the arena

of world politics; religious indifferentism, fascination for the occult and transcendent, disillusion with science and technology, the cry of the famished, the apathy of the religious, the opium of cult and a hundred and one contemporary phenomena will be source and matter for their reflection. The message from these they will dish out to their peoples. They may confer the titles of Saviour and Messiah on many a movement and power which traditionally pass for anti-god. With passion and power, verve and vision, they will urge their respective peoples and religions to strive after and realize identity and authenticity. May the God of all religions send many prophets for religious reform and interreligious dialogue.

M C B S Generalate

George Koonthanam

Chunangumvely

Alwaye

Jesus and the Nations

The history of mankind has two sides, one bright, consisting of achievements and growth, and the other dark, reflecting human wretchedness, mutual conflicts, wars and destruction. The bright side has its foundation on man's ability to build up bridges in his relation to other fellow-human beings, while the dark side takes its shape from man's selfish tendency of constructing walls of separation around himself. Since man is 'from below' as St. John would say¹, and often thinks in his own selfish and narrow way which is rather spontaneous to him, the dark side of human history with its evil of darkness of the collective unconscious of the past is still becoming darker by exerting its influence on all human beings of today. That is why the man of today is fully engaged in constructing and fortifying walls of separation in all levels of human life, national, social, economic, political, religious etc. But Jesus Christ, who, according to the gospel, is the one who came down 'from above'² and is at the same time the perfect man, has given a new world-vision to human kind to go beyond all man-made boundaries and perceive the invisible unity that binds all human beings together in a divine link which is himself. But even this revelation, when it came down to us in the Bible through human language, is not without ambiguity.

I. The general biblical attitude towards the gentiles

The word 'Gentiles' has been used in the Bible to translate the Greek word *ethnos* ("people", nation) and the Hebrew *goi* (pl. *goim*). It signifies the people who are non-Israelites.

In the OT the Mosaic laws provided a somewhat favourable attitude towards the Gentiles. The Israelite was com-

1. Cf. Jn 8:23

2. Cf. Jn 3:31

manded to show hospitality and love towards the Gentile stranger, remembering Israel's past history of being strangers in the land of Egypt³. The Kenites, especially the children of Rechab were treated by Israel almost as their brethren⁴. Uriah the Hittite was a trusted soldier of David⁵. Ittai the Gittite was Captain of David's guard⁶. Just as the Israelites, the Gentiles also had the right of asylum in the cities of refuge⁷. They might even possess Israelite slaves⁸. The law forbade to defraud a gentile servant of his wage⁹. Israel had to offer prayers and sacrifices for the Gentile rulers¹⁰.

But as we come to the NT times, we notice a change of attitude towards the Gentiles. It takes sometimes the shape of extreme aversion, scorn and hatred. The gentiles were considered unclean. It was unlawful to have any friendly relationship. They were thought of as enemies of God and of His people. They were not to be given the knowledge of God unless they become proselytes. Even in that stage they could not be admitted to full fellowship.

This change of attitude might have resulted from Israel's bitter experiences of the exile and persecutions. The exiled Jews experienced the bitterest treatment at the hands of their captors. Even when they came back and restored their nation and the Temple, they had to be in constant conflict with the gentile rulers of Syria and other neighbouring countries. The terrible persecution under Antiochus IV, and the desperate struggle for religious and political independence under the Maccabean leaders seem to have engendered in them a sense of exclusiveness and an antipathy to the gentiles.

II. Jesus' attitude towards the non-Jews

The NT reflects this general attitude of Judaism at that time. Nevertheless, if we evaluate the references to

3. Cf Dt. 10:19; Ex 23:9.

5. Cf. 2 Sm 11.

7. Cf. Num 35:15.

9. Cf. Dt. 24:15.

4. Cf. Jdg 1:16; 5:24; Jr 35.

6. Cf. 2 Sm 18:2.

8. Cf. Lev 25:47.

10. Cf. Jr 29:7; Bar 1:10-11; Ezr 6:10.

the Gentiles found in the Gospels, taking into account the special theological vision and attitudes of each evangelist, we can recognize the effort of Jesus to bring back a favourable attitude in the minds of his people towards the gentiles.

1. Jesus and the nations in the Gospel of Matthew

It is true that in some texts in the Gospel of Matthew the general antagonistic Jewish attitude towards the Gentiles is somehow articulated. For example, Mt 18:17 where it is said that the Christian who refuses to accept the fraternal correction should be treated like a pagan; Mt 5:47 which means that the pagans know only the natural law of loving those who love them and hating those who hate them; Mt 10:18 in which Jesus foretells that his disciples will be dragged to bear witness before the pagans. These in fact reflect the Jewish mind of the evangelist and of the Matthean community which consisted predominantly of the Jewish Christians in the beginning, although later more and more Gentile Christians joined that community.

a) Mt 10:5

A typical text of this sort can be seen in Mt 10:5. While Jesus was sending his twelve apostles for mission work, he instructed them: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mt 10:5-6). Here the idea implied is that the Jews are God's people, the Israel of the Old Covenant and therefore they are the heirs to the choice and promise of God, and so they are to be the first to receive the offer of the Messiah's saving work. In the parallel texts in Mk and Lk, where the same scene is narrated, this particular injunction not to go to the Gentiles and Samaritans is absent. Hence this particular saying in Mt 10:5 seems to reflect the Jewish mind of Matthew and of his Jewish Christian community, rather than the very mind of Jesus which in several other texts is obviously very broad and all embracing. This saying reported in Mt has not been understood by the

apostolic Church as a precept of Jesus to be followed. It only reflects the historical fact that the mission of Jesus was limited to the Jews. It points out a principle, which is not so clearly stated in Mk or Lk, that the Jews had a prior call and a special responsibility¹⁽¹⁾.

b) Mt 2:1-12

Even in the Gospel of Matthew, in spite of the exclusivism found in the injunction not to enter any pagan or Samaritan territory (Mt 10:5f.), we can notice a welcoming attitude towards the Gentiles reflected in several texts. Thus in Mt 2:1-12 the coming of the pagan magi to the Infant Jesus, the Saviour, is described with much importance.

The Magi (in Greek *magoi*) originally designated the learned priestly caste of the Persians. But later it came to signify anyone who is skilled in occult knowledge and power. Since Matthew links them with the seeing of the star, they are called magi because of their knowledge in astrology. Mt says that they came "from the east". This may be an indication that these magi came from Mesopotamia, the home of astrology in the Hellenistic world¹⁰⁽²⁾. However, it is clear that these magi were pagans. The story implies that they were also inspired and guided by the same God. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judah and thus when God became man, there are no more boundaries of exclusivism, that keep the Messiah separated from the pagans. The story shows that actually when Jesus the Saviour was born, it is the Gentiles who showed enthusiasm to worship him, while the Jews, even when they were informed of his birth, remained indifferent or inimical.

c) Mt 5:43-48

During the public ministry of Jesus, sometimes he spoke to his Jewish audience about the pagans as if he too shared their views concerning the Gentiles. In the

10(1). Cf. *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ad locum.

10(2). Cf. *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ad locum.

Sermon on the Mount as he was teaching his revolutionary doctrine on the love of enemies, he assumed that the pagans follow only the natural law of loving those who love them and hating those who hate them. He said: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy'. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax-collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You, therefore, must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Mt 5:43-48) But even here the Gentiles are viewed by Jesus as the object of God's all-embracing love, and as the children of the same God who is the Father of all human beings without the distinction of Jews or Gentiles, righteous or unrighteous.

d) Mt 6:7-13

As he taught the disciples how to pray, Jesus criticised the method of prayer of the Gentiles. He said: "And in praying do not heap empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come..." (Mt 6:7-13). But even though Jesus criticises the praying method of the Gentiles, from the tenor of his whole sermon, Jesus does not seem to assume a negative attitude of excluding the Gentiles from their right of calling the same God their Father and praying to Him.

e) God can raise children even from stones

This idea of rejecting the exclusivism of Israel and of considering all people as God's children is implied in the preaching of John the Baptist. He said to the Pharisees and Sadducees: "Do not presume to tell yourselves,

'We have Abraham for our Father', because, I tell you, God can raise children for Abraham from these stones" (Mt 3:9). St Paul also clarifies this point when he wrote to the Romans: "Not all the descendants of Abraham are his true children... it is not physical descent that decides who are the children of God" (Rom 9:78). To the Jews who were boasting of their descent from Abraham and thereby becoming the heirs of the promises of God Jesus said plainly that such physical descent from Abraham had no value before God. Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And such slaves become God's free children only when they are liberated by the Son of God¹ (3). Hence, Jesus did not approve the exclusivism of Judaism which was based on the physical descent from Abraham. For him all people are God's free children provided that they placed themselves at the feet of the son of God be liberated by the truth which is in Him.

f) Mt 15:21-28

The climax of the negative Jewish attitude towards the non-Jews is reflected in Mt 15:21-28. When Jesus came to the region of Tyre and Sidon, a Canaanite woman approached him pleading him to cure her daughter possessed by the devil. "But Jesus answered her not a word." When the disciples recommended her case, Jesus said: "I am sent only to the lost sheep of Israel". When the woman came and knelt at his feet and insistently pleaded, he said: "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the house-dogs."

These words and attitude clearly reflect the typically Jewish mind of the evangelist. According to the Jewish Christian attitude, Christ must first devote himself to the salvation of the Jews, who alone are the children of God and of His promises, before turning to the Gentiles. To the Jewish mind, the Gentiles were 'dogs'. The evangelist, however, has mitigated the expression by using the Greek word

Kynarion meaning 'little dog' or 'pet dog', which is the diminutive form of *kynon*, 'dog'. This as well as the happy ending of this story shows that the evangelist was aware of the nature of his community which consisted not only of the Jewish Christians, but also of the Gentile Christians.

When Jesus spoke in the traditional Jewish language and attitude, the Canaanite woman replied: 'Ah Yes, Sir; but even house-dogs can eat the scraps that fall from their master's table.' Then Jesus answered: "Woman, you have great faith. Let your wish be granted." In this last part of the Matthean narrative we see the real attitude of Jesus towards the Gentiles actually escaping the rigorous redactional activity of the Jewish mind of the evangelist. Jesus appreciates and acknowledges the great faith of the Gentiles now found expression in that Canaanite woman. So he granted her what she asked for. By this she is admitted to share the same table of the Messianic benefits, which was formerly set apart for the Jewish nation exclusively.

g) Mt 12:14-21

Even though the evangelist Matthew had at first the typically Jewish mind of Jewish exclusivism, later it seems to have undergone a change when he had to report the rejection of Jesus by the synagogue of the Jews. Jesus healed the withered hand of a man in the synagogue. "But the Pharisees went out and took counsel against him, how to destroy him. Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. And many followed him, and he healed them all, and ordered them not to make him known. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: 'Behold my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he shall proclaim justice to the *Gentiles*. He will not wrangle or cry aloud, nor will any one hear his voice in the streets; he will not break a bruised reed or quench a smouldering wick, till he brings justice to victory; and in his name will the *Gentiles* hope'. "(Mt 12:14-21) Here, quoting from Is 42:1-4, Matthew emphasizes the point that the Messiah is not merely for the Jews, but he is also for the Gentiles

"to proclaim justice" to them (v.18) and to be a hope for them (v.21). From the context it seems that Jesus withdrew himself from the official Judaism of the synagogue and went out to the common people, which consisted of a large number of the Gentiles too, from whom "many followed him, and he healed them all" (v.16).

h) Mt 8:5-13

Jesus' positive attitude towards the Gentiles is well depicted, in the story of healing the Centurion's servant (Mt 8:5-13). As the Centurion informed Jesus that his servant is sick, immediately Jesus tells him: "I will come and heal him" (v. 7). When the Centurion said that Jesus should not take the trouble of coming down to his house, but needs only to say a word from afar, Jesus "marvelled and said to those who followed him, 'Truly, I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from the east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness'" (v. 10-12). Here Jesus means that the Gentiles will come from all parts of the world and will enjoy the benefit of the work of the Messiah, while the Jews will lose it. This same truth was expressed elsewhere when Jesus spoke to the reward-seeking disciples. "But many that are first will be last, and the last first." (Mt 19:30) These sayings concerning the entrance of the Gentiles into the kingdom and the possibility of their becoming the first while the Jews losing their priority for the messianic kingdom are found also in Lk 13:28-30. Hence these could be the genuine sayings of Jesus, which not even Matthew could hush up.

Thus Jesus made the Jewish attitude of superiority and exclusivism crumble down. He broke away the partition wall between the Jews and the Gentiles. As he ascended into heaven, he gave the missionary mandate to his disciples saying: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (28:19). Hence in the Gospel of Matthew we

see, in fact, a Jesus who is fully open to all the nations. He appreciates them and is concerned with them.

II. Luke on Jesus of the nations

In the Gospel of Lk we see clearly Jesus go out to the people at large, disregarding all barriers.

a) Jesus and the crowd

When Matthew says about the public ministry of Jesus, as "Jesus went about all the cities and villages teaching in their synagogues and preaching the Gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every infirmity" (Mt 9:35), Mark reports: "And he went about among the villages teaching", and Lk puts it as "Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, preaching and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God" (Lk 8:1). This shows that unlike Matthew, Luke as well as Mark is giving us a picture of Jesus who was going out to the people at large without any restriction or exclusivism. The concentration of Jesus' ministry to the Synagogues may be due to the Jewish mind of Matthew. Hence the real attitude of the historical Jesus might have been what is depicted by Mk and Lk. In that case, we discover between the lines of the Gospel a Jesus who was positively open to the people of other religions.

b) Messiah of all without distinction

In the Synagogue of Nazareth, by reading Is 61:1-2, Jesus revealed the programme of his mission¹¹. As he explained that text, he pinpointed that in the salvation history God has manifested his special concern and choice of the Gentiles, and that he is sent to them. To illustrate this he referred to two incidents of the OT. He said: "But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when there came a great famine over all the land, and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath.

11. Cf. Lk 4:16-30

in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." (Lk 4:25-27) Here, Jesus has expressed his solidarity with the poor, the sick and the oppressed without any distinction and discrimination of caste and creed. He preached beatitudes to all of them¹². He taught them that God is the loving and caring Father and all men are his children and thereby brothers and sisters. He instructed them to have a large heart as that of the heavenly Father, which extends its love to all, even to the enemies without any restriction¹²⁽¹⁾.

c) Jesus and the Samaritans

In fact, he had a soft corner towards the Samaritans. When he said a parable to illustrate how to love one's neighbour, he made good Samaritan the hero of that parable¹²⁽²⁾. When the ten lepers were cured, and only one of them who was a Samaritan came back to thank him, Jesus said: "Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" (Lk 17:18) Here Jesus appreciated the faith and gratitude of a non-Jew, a Samaritan.

When a Samaritan village refused to receive Jesus on his way to Jerusalem, James and John said: "Lord, do you want us to bid fire come down from heaven and consume them?" (Lk 9: 54) This question reflects the typically Jewish and human way of thinking. But Jesus turned and rebuked them saying: "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of; for the son of man came not to destroy men's lives but to save them" (Lk 9:55). This incident shows the real opposition between the narrow mind of the Jewish disciples and the all-embracing heart of Jesus. Thus Luke, by his Gospel, leaves before us a picture of Jesus, who tolerates the non-Jews, and shows concern for them even when they keep an inimical attitude.

12. Cf. Mt 5:3-12; Lk 6:20-23.

12(1). Cf. Lk 6:27-28, 32-36.

12(2). Cf. Lk 10:29-37.

III. Jesus of the nations in John

a) The dialogue with Nicodemus

In the Gospel of John, this positive attitude of Jesus is depicted more clearly. In his dialogue with Nicodemus, Jesus told him that the activity of the Holy Spirit is mysterious as that of the wind¹³. This implies that the activity of the Holy Spirit is not confined to any people or any man-made boundaries. Even among the non-Jews the Spirit is active.

As the dialogue proceeded, Jesus said a still more universalistic statement: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him." (Jn 3:16-17) By this Jesus manifests his fundamental attitude towards people of other religions. He was aware of God's great love for all the people, and of his responsible mission to save the whole humankind without any distinction.

b) Jesus and the woman at the well

Jesus manifested this great love in his Samaritan Mission¹⁴. When he sat at Jacob's well, a Samaritan woman came and began to draw water. Then breaking all the man-made walls of social separation, Jesus asked her to give him a drink. Then a dialogue starts. Right from the beginning up to the end of this dialogue Jesus respects that Samaritan woman and carefully leads her step by step to a deeper understanding of his own personality. At one point of the conversation, when she perceived Jesus as a prophet she put before him a theological question: "Our Fathers worshipped on this mountain, and you say Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship" (4:20). Then Jesus told her of the need of transcending from the man-made boundaries in worship: "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem

13. Cf. Jn 3:8

14. Cf. 1-42

will you worship the Father." (4:21) About the place and manner of worship there are often quarrels among different religions. About such matters each religion has a philosophy of its own. But Jesus expressed his view that man has to transcend such considerations which keep people separated from each other. What is important is that all actually and truly worship God. Jesus explained this true worship like this: "The hour is coming and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (4:23-24). By this Jesus seems to mean that true worship is a worship which is beyond all rituals and localization and has an interiority when man moved by the Holy Spirit, stands before God with all sincerity and openness, being united with the eternal truth which is identical with Jesus¹⁵, and establishes a filial relationship with God, calling Him "Abba!"¹⁶.

This teaching of Jesus envisages a possibility of going beyond all man-made boundaries of separation between Jews and Samaritans, between Jews and Gentiles, between Christians and non-Christians, and of acknowledging a transcendental reality of communion in which all men are children of the same Father, God, and are brothers and sisters among themselves. It is with this broad vision that Jesus spoke with the Samaritan woman, and went to the Samaritans and stayed with them for two days¹⁷.

c) Jesus the Good Shepherd of all

When Jesus revealed himself as the Good Shepherd (Jn 10:1-18), he specially mentioned that his sheep consist not only of those who are of the fold of Judaism, but also of those who are of the world at large; for he said: "And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there will be

15. Cf. Jn 14:6

16. Cf. Gal. 4:6

17. Cf. Jn 4:39-42.

one flock and one shepherd" (Jn 10:16). For Jesus, the distinction between "his sheep" and "not his sheep" depends not on whether they belong to the same race, nationality, caste or religion, but on whether they heed his voice or not. It implies, therefore, that even people of different religions belong to him, provided they had the voice of the logos, the word of God which is resounding in their own religions and more especially in their conscience, and follow the path of eternal truth which is Jesus.

d) Jesus' death: a salvific act for all

The raising of Lazarus to life by Jesus had two reactions. Many positively believed in him¹⁸. But the leaders of the people had a negative reaction and gathered in an emergency session of the Sanhedrin, in which Caiphas the High priest spoke. "You know nothing at all; you do not understand that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish." (Jn 11:49-50) This would imply that the purpose of Jesus' death was only to save the Jewish nation. But the evangelist interprets that saying like this: "He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad." (11:51-52) According to this interpretation, therefore, Jesus dies not only for the Jewish nation but also for his "other sheep" of the whole world who would heed his voice.

e) The Greeks in search of the saviour

Actually it was when some Greeks came to Jesus that he realized that his hour of suffering, death and resurrection has come¹⁹. These Greeks represent all the Gentiles of the world who are in search of the saviour of the world. Jesus' redemptive work is, therefore, meant not merely for a particular people, but all the nations of the world.

18. Cf. Jn 11:45.

19. Cf. Jn 12:20-26

f) All will be drawn to the Crucified

This universalistic dimension of Jesus' existence is well articulated when he premeditated upon his own death. He said: "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself" (12:32). Jesus was, therefore, well aware of his function as the Saviour of the world. When he is exalted on the Cross, and when his salvific work is accomplished, he will draw all people to himself without excluding anybody from the benefit of his redemptive work. The Johannine Jesus, therefore, considers himself as the Saviour of all people of good will, no matter to what religion or nationality they belong.

Conclusion

Our foregoing analysis of the Gospels shows that, in spite of the redactional activity of the evangelists, the positive attitude of Jesus towards people of other religions is still discernible. Various gradations of this attitude can be discovered in them. In the first place Jesus, in his dealings with the non-Jews, manifested religious tolerance. He did not approve for example the intolerant attitude of the sons of Zebedee towards people of other religions who were not ready to accept Jesus. Secondly he showed his concern for the people of other religions. For instance, he considered himself the Good Shepherd ready to die also for his sheep that are not of the Jewish fold. He extended his power of healing also to the Gentiles. Thirdly he loved them and found the meaning of his own life in dying for them. Thus when the Greeks came in search of Jesus he saw himself as the Saviour of all peoples of the world and said that, as a grain of wheat, he must die to be useful for others. This implies that beyond the visible unity of the Christians in a structured Church, there is one invisible unity of all men of good will who respond positively to the demands of the Logos coming to them through their religious traditions and conscience and thus remain integrated with Christ invisibly. Thus Jesus Christ by his life and teaching revealed to humankind that God

is our common Father and all human beings are brothers and sisters indiscriminately of their nationality, caste and creed.

If this precious truth revealed by Jesus is seriously grasped by Christians first and then by the people of all other religions, the world of today will not see bloodshed and communal strifes, wars and self-destruction of human society any more. Then there will be a new world in which people of all religions meet together in friendship and go hand in hand in their pilgrimage to discover the beauty of the eternal truth, their final goal.

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Paul and his Attitude toward the Gentiles

"What I am saying is that what is sacrificed on pagan altars is offered to demons, not to God. And I do not want you to be partners with demons. You cannot drink from the Lord's cup and also from the cup of demons; you cannot eat at the Lord's table and also at the table of demons. Or do we want to make the Lord jealous? Do we think that we are stronger than he?" (1 Cor 10:20-22) In these words Paul was answering a question raised by the Corinthians regarding the eating of meat of animals sacrificed in pagan temples. There was also the question of Christians joining pagan friends and relatives in common meals celebrating family festivals. At times these meals were held in a temple and were intimately associated with the worship of a pagan deity. Even when

the meal was held at home, the meat would frequently be that of a sacrificial victim. Taking all these contexts into consideration Paul makes his mind clear in the words cited above.

The idea behind what Paul says is clear enough; he does not admit any compromise in inter-religious relations. Paul wants the Christians to keep away from all contaminating associations with pagans, because they worship demons! As Yahweh was a jealous God, so too the Lord of the Christians is jealous! He is also strong!! An even stronger and uncompromising passage we have in the second Letter to the Corinthians: "Do not unite yourselves with unbelievers; they are not fit mates for you. What has righteousness to do with wickedness? Can light consort with darkness? Can Christ agree with Belial, or a believer join hands with an unbeliever? Can there be a compact between the temple of God and the idols of the heathen? And the temple of the living God is what we are." (2 Cor 6:14-16)

The attitude of the Church towards the non-Christians in the history of the Church was greatly influenced by the Bible in general, but specifically by this Pauline teaching. The Church affirmed the uniqueness of Christ and the superiority of Christianity over other religions on theological as well as apologetical grounds and consequently it developed an attitude of hatred and intolerance towards all non-Christian religions, which was ethically justified and approved as the correct and necessary approach. However, we now feel ashamed of being the posterity of that generation, precisely because we have grown beyond understanding the defects and limitations of our earlier approach. First of all, our traditional attitude was just an uncritical application derived from the mentality prevailing in the western world, where Christianity was the only religion and from where missionaries went to all parts of the world to convert the "pagans" and make them members of the Church and thus to enable them to be "saved".

An equally important source of our negative attitude towards the non-Christian religions was the unscientific and uncritical study and application of the Bible and its teaching and it seems that the study of Pauline writings also played an important role in the whole process. The present study is an attempt to evaluate the context in which Paul articulated his thoughts about non-Christian religions and at the same time an effort is made to make his teaching understandable and relevant for our times, especially in the light of the present day teaching of the Church.

Paul's Jewish background

Paul was a Jew; even after his conversion he had a special appreciation for his Jewish heritage (Phil 3:5-6). For him the Gospel was destined first of all to the Jews and then to the Gentiles (Rom 1:16). This Jewish background left in Paul certain tendencies which made him continue his negative approach to the latter. During the Babylonian captivity and afterwards the Jews began to be very critical of the idolatry of the Gentiles. Deutero-Isaiah has a bold presentation of this negative approach (cf. Is 40:18-26; 44:9-20; 46:1-2). Prophet Jeremiah also condemned idolatry (Jer 10:1-9). The Sixth Chapter of Baruch, known as the Letter of Jeremiah, is a vehement condemnation of idolatry. Later the author of the Book of Wisdom presents a systematic study to prove the folly of idolatry (Wis 13:10-19:22). Though there were positive approaches to non-biblical religions in certain quarters, such as the one found in the Book of Ruth, on the whole the attitude of the Jews was very negative. In the inter-testamental period also this tendency continued. The Jews criticised the Gentiles for their polytheism, idolatry and immoral practice.

In his serious effort to prove that the whole humanity is under the power of sin, Paul had recourse to the same technique used by the Jews. So he writes to the Romans showing how mankind has failed in its basic duty towards God and indulged in polytheism, idolatry and immorality (Rom 1:18-32). But it may be noted that Paul does not specify these as the sins of the Gentiles, although

practically he had his thoughts centred on the Gentiles. He tried to establish that here we have a humanity which abandoned God and which God also abandoned to its folly and vices. It was a question of positive rejection of their capacity to know God and worship him. It was an admission of wrong value systems in their practical life. Though it is said that God abandoned them (cf Rom 1:24, 26, 28), it is a way of talking which means that they chose for themselves a way of life which did not give any place for God.

Paul writes to the Galatians: "In the past you did not know God, and so you were slaves of beings who are not gods." (Gal 3:8) The same style is found in his Letter to the Ephesians: "In the past you were spiritually dead because of your disobedience and sins. At that time you followed the world's evil way; you obeyed the ruler of the spiritual powers in space, the spirit who now controls the people who disobey God." (Eph 2:1-2) On the whole, Paul understood the condition of the Gentiles before their conversion to Christianity as something characterized by alienation and subjection to evil powers and having nothing positive about it.

Paul, the apostle of the gentiles

The call of Paul was something unique. He was called to make Christ's name known to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; 22:21). *The Acts of the Apostles* explains how Barnabas and Saul were sent out to preach among the Gentiles from the Church of Antioch (Acts 13:1-3). Their mission was a great success. In fact, Paul realized that the Gentiles were better prepared to accept the Gospel than the Jews themselves. So he began to concentrate on the Gentile regions. Thus at the end of the discourse to the Jews at Antioch of Pisidia, Paul says: "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. But since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we will leave you and go to the Gentiles. For this is the commandment that the Lord has given us: 'I have made you a light to the Gentiles, so that all the world may be saved.' When

the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and praised the Lord's message; and those who had been chosen for eternal life became believers. The word of the Lord spread everywhere in that region." (Acts 13:46-49) The contrast between the unbelief of the Jews and the readiness of the Gentiles to accept the Gospel was something remarkable. Moreover, on account of this the Jews started persecuting Paul and Barnabas and threw them out of their region (Acts 13:50).

It was natural, therefore, for Paul to appreciate the Gentile Christians for their good will and generosity to accept God's word and become believers. Paul writes to the Thessalonians: "We remember before our God and Father how you put your faith into practice, how your love made you work so hard, and how your hope in our Lord Jesus Christ is firm. Our brothers, we know that God loves you and has chosen you to be his own. For we brought the Good News to you, not with words only, but also with power and the Holy Spirit, and with complete conviction of its truth... So you became an example to all believers in Macedonia and Achaia. For not only did the message about the Lord go out from you throughout Macedonia and Achaia, but the news about your faith in God has gone everywhere. There is nothing, then, that we need to say." (1 Thes 1:3-8)

Most of the Gentiles to whom Paul preached were unsophisticated, simple people. They were ready to part with their former religious practices and were happy to put into practice the new teaching Paul and his associates had imparted to them. We know that the community of Philippi was the dearest one to Paul. He wrote to them asking to "watch out for the dogs, for the evil-workers", meaning the circumcision party of the Jewish Christians who were disturbing the peace of the Philippians. He appreciated them for their generosity and concern toward him.

But there was a major problem among the Gentile

Christians. It was the question of their pagan life-style, especially in matters of sexual morality. The problem was more serious in the Church of Corinth; it was present in other Churches as well. In Corinth there was the question of a certain man living with his step-mother, a custom not found even among pagans, according to Paul (1 Cor 5:1-13). Corinth was known for its permissiveness and when it made in-roads into Christian life Paul had to react. He asked the Church to excommunicate the culprit in order to place him in a situation in which he could understand the seriousness of the problem and repent so that "his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Cor 5:5). Paul knew how bad examples could spoil the whole structure he was gradually building up.

In 1 Cor 6:12-20 Paul deals with a larger problem of libertinism, sexual promiscuity and prostitution. "The body is not to be used for sexual immorality, but to serve the Lord" (1 Cor 6:13). Since Christians formed parts of the body of Christ, it was not at all proper that these parts were joined to the body of the prostitute. Paul writes: "Avoid immorality. Any other sin a man commits does not affect his body, but the man who is guilty of sexual immorality sins against his own body." (1 Cor 6:18)

In the same way he wrote to the Ephesians: "Since you are God's people, it is not right that any matters of sexual immorality or indecency or greed should even be mentioned among you. Nor is it fitting for you to use language which is obscene, profane or vulgar.... You may be sure that no one who is immoral or indecent or greedy will ever receive a share in the kingdom of Christ and of God." (Eph 5:3-5) He wrote to the Thessalonians also about the same problem: "God wants you to be holy and completely free from sexual immorality. Each of you men should know how to live with his wife in a holy and honourable way, not with a lustful desire, like the heathen who do not know God. In this matter, then, no man should do wrong to his fellow-Christian or take advantage of him. We have told you this before, and we strongly warned you that the

Lord will punish those who do that. God did not call us to live in immorality, but in holiness. So then, whoever rejects this teaching is not rejecting man, but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit." (1 Thes 4:3-8)

It seems that Paul's critical attitude toward's the Gentiles has probably another reason also. The reflection is related to the Letter to the Romans. It is a mooted question why Paul wrote the Letter to the Romans. For some exegetes, it was a serene and systematic exposition of his theological thinking, especially about human salvation as God's gift through Christ. For others it is also related to some practical problems existing in the Church of Rome, and Paul took the freedom to discuss them, though he was not the founder of that Church (Rom 15:20). One of the problems was the uneasy attitude between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians in Rome. It is probable that at the time Paul wrote the Letter to the Romans the majority of the Christians there were Gentile Christians. Being a majority, they might have started developing an attitude of superiority and presumption on the plea that they have accepted Christ and that they have a right to look down on Israel (Rom 11:13-24). They might have started having a tendency to think that they have become the chief pawn on the chessboard and have taken Israel's place in the heart of God. But Paul warns them not to be smug about their favoured situation. They are not to look down on the unbelieving Jews who have been cut off from the source of life. God loves the Gentiles in the same way as he loves the Jews and he punishes the pride of Gentiles in the same way as he punishes the infidelity of the Jews. The rejection of the Jews is the result of its lack of faith, just as the admission of the Gentiles is due to their gift of faith. This faith, as formerly the election of Israel, is a gift which God has given and which he ultimately controls. The present advantage of the Gentiles to be believers does not therefore flow from any superiority which it is in their power to exploit; they enjoy a grace from which they can profit only if they remain in a state of humility so that they may continue to receive it as the free gift of God.

God is not tied to the Gentiles by what he has done for them than he was to Israel through his election grace. He is tied only to his love. If the pride of election caused the downfall of Israel, the Gentile Christians have to remind themselves that the pride of faith can lead them to stumble. The faith of which a man boasts is, by that very fact, no longer faith.

It is quite probable that Paul had to deal with such a delicate situation in the Church of Rome and in that he had to remain logical on the one hand and loyal to his Jewish heritage on the other. Though he was a Christian, dedicated in his attachment to Christ, Paul still looked on himself as a member of the same race as the Jews. He called it literally "my flesh" (Rom 9:3) and thereby gave vivid expression to his solidarity with them. His sorrow was great and the pain in his heart was endless (Rom 9:2). He said: For their sake I could wish that I myself were under God's curse and separated from Christ" (Rom 9:3), a desire Moses once voiced before Yahweh when he faced the infidelity and sin of the covenant people (Ex 32:32). It is therefore natural to think of Paul as having a cautious attitude to the Gentile Christians and this too may have resulted in Paul's negative approach to the Gentiles as a whole.

The dynamics of an infant religion

It is true that Christianity did not evolve in the first century as a sectarian movement and if we can take Luke seriously he was against all such 'sect' aspect of understanding Christianity. For him Christianity was more *the way* (*hē hodos*) (Acts 9:2) and he makes Paul speak a language in which Paul corrects the misunderstandings of the Jewish leaders who considered Christianity as a 'sect' (*hairesis*), (Acts 24:14-16) the "sect of the Nazarenes" (Acts 5:17). Christianity was more a way of life, a life rooted in faith in Jesus Christ and the community of these believers were those who transcended racial, social and sexual discriminating principles (Gal 3:28; Col 3:10-11; 1 Cor 12:13). However, as an infant religious movement

which had to establish its identity both from Judaism and from Gentile religions, the leaders in the Christian communities had to evolve a policy of non-compromise and isolation, which eventually led to a kind of superiority complex on the one hand and a ghetto mentality on the other. Stephen had initiated a process of liberating the Christian movement from Judaism (Acts 6:8. 7:68). The same principle of liberating the Christian life-style from the Gentile religions led to a kind of intolerance and quasi-hatred towards them, even if we could establish that it was not willed or planned by anybody, much less by Paul.

An equally valid consideration for evaluating Paul's attitude towards the Gentile religions is the problem of well-informed and little-informed Christians living together and the latter being easily scandalized by the actions and attitudes of the former. Paul calls them 'strong in conscience' and the 'weak in conscience' (1 Cor 8:4-13). In such matters as eating meat offered to idols, taking some food as unclean and others as clean, or considering some days more important than other days, there were chances of scandals and lack of unity and peace in the Christian communities. Some of these problems were related to Jewish practices, others were arising from the customs of Gentiles. On the whole it led to confusion and Paul had to instruct the community about the bad consequences of indiscriminate use of 'knowledge' by some elites in the community. For Paul, 'knowledge' is not the criterion of action or non-action, because knowledge puffs a person up with pride, whereas love builds up (1 Cor 8:1). Therefore Paul warns: "Be careful not to let your freedom of action make those who are weak in faith fall into sin" (1 Cor 8:9). Paul's position is made clear: "If food makes my brother sin, I will never eat meat again, so as not to make my brother fall into sin" (1 Cor 8:13).

Paul's argument is clear: "Those who are strong in the faith ought to help the weak to carry their burdens. We should not please ourselves. Instead, we should all please our brothers for their own good, in order to build

them up in the faith." (Rom 15:1-2) It is this Christian altruism that prompted Paul to enjoin several structures on the Christian communities and indirectly they led to certain conclusions which supported a negative understanding of religious practices among the Gentiles (cf. Rom 14:13-23). Paul's ultimate aim was the building up of the Christian communities in which both Jewish and Gentile Christians had to live in peace, harmony and love. He writes: "We must always aim at these things that bring peace and that help to strengthen one another. Do not, because of food, destroy what God has done. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of the righteousness, peace, and joy which the Holy Spirit gives" (Rom 14:17,19-20).

Limitations of pauline perspectives

The above analysis of Paul's attitude to the Gentiles was precisely meant to situate Paul in the world and context of his thinking and theological reflection. No attempt has been made either to criticize him or to justify him for what he wrote. It is a sincere appraisal of what we can conclude from his writings and it is the honest and sincere duty of an exegete to do so. The first and foremost duty of any exegete is to accept these limitations of Pauline thought as limitations and not to get alarmed about it. We should not force Paul to speak in our language, and, I am sure, Paul does not force us to speak in his language. We are not doing any disservice to Paul by accepting the fact that Paul had his limitations in certain areas of his thinking, and his attitude towards Gentiles and Gentile religions was one of them.

The main issue underlying the whole problem is this. We are still far behind the proper understanding of the Bible as the Word of God in words of men. We still have a tendency to absolutize Pauline statements for the simple fact that they are found in his writings. As early as 1943, Pope Pius XII in his Encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* had to make it clear that we should critically and scientifically study the Bible and take into account the

literary forms, the mentality and psychological background of the authors. The *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* has made a similar statement: "Since God speaks in Sacred Scripture through man in human fashion, the interpreter of Sacred Scripture, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words" (art 12).

Paul was primarily a *pastoral* theologian. He had to deal with practical issues in the Christian communities which he or others had founded. In dealing with practical problems it was only natural that Paul was influenced by his religious heritage and psychological background. Added to that, he always wanted peace and harmony, unity and love to reign in the communities for which he wanted both the Gentile Christians and the Jewish Christians to accept restrictions and limit the use of freedom. Paul himself was one who restricted his freedom to a great extent for the good of the communities (1 Cor 9:1-23). On the one hand we have to admit the positive value of this pastoral concern as something we put into practice in the context of our pastoral problems. But on the other hand we should be ready to recognize the limited vision of Paul which he inherited from his Jewish training. Our long Christian tradition of accepting the Bible as the word of God in an uncritical and unscientific manner, made this second approach difficult and we are still labouring under this confusing situation. It is the living tradition of the Church, in which the magisterium occupies a very significant role, which has the duty and right to reinterpret and re-read the Bible and adapt the message of the Bible upholding the word of God in it. The Spirit of God, who guided the process of the articulation of the Word of God in human language, continues to guide the Church and her members in arriving at the "total truth" (Jn 16:13). We are still far away from the comprehension of that total truth and the pilgrim Church and her pilgrim people will do well to

march towards it in sincerity and in humility, in openness and in broad-mindedness. God's Word transcends man's words.

Conclusion

Paul's attitude towards Gentiles and their religions is a typical example of how we have to adapt the biblical teaching to the present situation and current teaching of the Church. The *Declaration on non-Christian Religions* by Vatican II (1965) has given us the new guide-lines and positive orientations in our approach to and evaluation of non-christian religions. In following this directive we only put into practice what the Church wants her members to do. It is a matter of regret that at various levels this awareness has not made any in-roads and consequently there is still much suspicion and anxiety about inter-religious dialogue and collaboration. If Paul were to live today, it seems he would be the one who would appreciate the other religions and would promote inter-religious dialogue and at the same time he would blame many who uncritically and unscientifically understand his writings about the Gentiles. A country like India where all the major religions of the world have their home invites us to this new approach and it is the duty of every Indian exegete to take pains to liberate the Word of God from its centuries-old sectarian and ghetto-minded understanding and interpretation, some of which they have assimilated within the closed walls of Western Universities.

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Discussion Forum

The following comment by Abraham Parampil from Rome is meant to be a reply to J. B. Chethimattam's review article on "Varieties of Orientalism" published in *Jeevadhara* 77. Though it does not strictly conform to our standards (cf. *Jeevadhara* 7, p. 10), we are publishing it lest we should be judged partial. Some of the glaring personal remarks and observations which ill become any theological discussion have been omitted. The comment touches only a fringe of Chethimattam's article and leaves untouched his main contentions.

General Editor

On "Varieties of Orientalism" by Rev. Fr. J. B. Chethimattam

Controversies are inevitable in a historical process in which a Church tries to rediscover its identity and affirms its existence, but it is the duty of all concerned, especially of the scholars, to be precise in their affirmations. Otherwise there is the danger of controversies turning into a muddled polemics of "ad hominem" arguments.

Rev. Fr. Chethimattam in his Review in *Jeevadhara* on *Varieties of Orientalism* bases on hearsay his criticism on *The Roman Document: The Order of the Holy Mass (Qurbana) of the Syro Malabar Church 1981*, dated March 31, 1983, when he says:

a) "This document sent by Vatican Congregation for the Oriental Churches is generally known to be the work of Fr. R. Taft of the Oriental Institute, a specialist in Byzantine Tradition." One wonders how Fr. Chethimattam came to this assumption. He could have very well enquired whether the Congregation appointed a committee of experts to review the text of the Qurbana. Fr. Chethimattam

makes it sound that an official document of the Congregation is a personal letter of Fr Taft, by his assertions: "Fr Taft decrees...", "He indignantly asks", etc. Rev. Fr. Chethimattam is known as a scholar in Philosophy and Dogmatic Theology, although not a specialist in Liturgy. Hence one would expect from him the factual accuracy demanded by an honest scholarship when he ventures into the criticism of an authoritative document even if it does not suit his tastes. The fact is that a commission, and not Fr Taft alone, are responsible for the study on which the Sacred Oriental Congregation based its document.

b) "... who had often *publically* stated he knew nothing about the Malabar Church or the Indian Culture". It will be interesting to know who heard Fr Taft saying that he knew *nothing* about the Malabar Church. One's scholarship is attested to by the merit of what one writes as well as one's academic credentials. Indeed Fr Taft is an authority in Byzantine Liturgy and at the same time he is equally well versed in Comparative Liturgy. His books and articles bear witness to this fact. That an authority in Comparative Liturgy should be on a commission to review a controversial text of the Qurbana is self evident and according to the very principle which Fr Chethimattam enunciates in the same review: "The local Church for them is not simply a part of the Universal Church, but the one Universal Church itself. Any split or heresy in the local Church rends the seamless garment of Christ".

Rev. Fr Chethimattam seems to be very much concerned with the purity of the Chaldean tradition to be retained in the Qurbana of the Malabar Church when he challenges the competence of Fr Taft saying that "by training and temperament a Byzantine is right the opposite of what the Syrian tradition stands for". However the same Fr Chethimattam had totally disclaimed the Chaldean tradition of the Malabar Church when he wrote to Cardinal Parecatil stating that, "although it is more than three quarters of a century since we gained independence from

the Latins it is as if we got stuck in our defensive attitude against the Latins and are unwittingly taking on ourselves the yoke of Chaldean tradition unconsciously assuming that we have to be always under some one else's domination" (Letter to Cardinal Parecattil dated 16 October 1982)

His assertion: "In fact it was not on account of doctrinal differences, but in opposition to the Byzantinization of the Church that the East Syrians separated themselves from the main body of the Church", will melt and glide away before relevant historical facts, if by Byzantinization he means an arbitrary attempt by the Byzantine Church to impose its tradition and liturgy on the East Syrian Church.

Then he says: "Every liturgist knows that if (Mass facing the people) was not a Latin tradition but something adopted after the Vatican II in view of the Banquet nature of the Eucharist". It would be better to look further into the matter before pronouncing a statement on behalf of every liturgist: (a) whether Mass facing the people was something adopted only after the Vatican II; (b) whether it was simply to highlight the Banquet aspect that it was adopted (By the way it may be pointed out to all who stress very much the banquet nature of the Eucharist that one of the first structural reforms in the early church was the separation of the Agape from the Eucharist), and (c) whether this custom was adopted in all the ecclesial traditions or only in the Latin Church. Once one enquires into these questions one is sure to discover that every liturgist knows much better.

Rev. Fr Chethimattam is not happy that the Oriental Congregation treats our Bishops like children. But immediately afterwards he advises the Congregation "to ask our bishops to forget their petty differences and work together for the good of the Church".

Abraham Parampil

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1 December 1983.

J. B. Chethimattam's Rejoinder

I have nothing against Fr. Robert Taft, who is a good Byzantine scholar. My comments are against the contents of the Roman Document, which hold valid whether Fr. Taft wrote it or a commission produced it. The basis of my comments is nothing but scholarship.

May I add here that the best authorities in liturgy and ecclesiastical history, including Jungmann, Gregory Dix and recently Jaroslav Pelikan have shown from documents that the post sixth century Chaldean tradition has serious errors in faith, theology and especially spirituality. It may be politeness not to accuse the Chaldeans of heresy. It will be no less than stupidity from our part to let their dubious tradition be imposed on us as our "heritage". Is the Holy See an Oracle? Everybody in Rome, except the Holy Father, seems to claim infallibility in everything. Unless we go by strict scholarship and raise our voice in defence of truth we may end up in a greater slavery than the one the Portuguese imposed on us. The future of the Syro-Malabar Church is not in Chaldea but right here in India in our missionary task to make the Gospel relevant to the millions of India.

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(26)
Publisher

Statement about Ownership and other Particulars

about **Jeevadhara**

(Form IV — see Rule 8)

1. Place of Publication : Kottayam.
2. Periodicity of its Publication : Monthly.
3. Printer's Name : Fr Constantine Manalel, C. M. I.
Nationality : Indian
Address : Theology Centre,
Kottayam.
4. Publisher's Name : Fr Constantine Manalel, C. M. I.
Nationality : Indian
Address : Theology Centre,
Kottayam.
5. Editor's Name : Fr Constantine Manalel, C. M. I.
Nationality : Indian
Address : i Theology Centre,,
Kottayam.

Names and addresses of individuals who own the Newspaper (and partners or shareholders holding more than one percent of the total capital): Fr Constantine Manalel, C. M. I. Theology Centre, Kottayam.

I, Constantine Manalel, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

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Publisher